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## Saudi embassy resumes work in Iran after 7 years

### US-Saudi bond boosted by Mideast normalization push

**TEHRAN/RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran has resumed operations, state media in Iran reported Wednesday, following a thaw in ties seven years after the mission was closed. Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen their respective embassies following a China-brokered deal announced in March.

The long-time regional rivals severed ties in 2016 after Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran were attacked during protests over Riyadh's execution of Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. "The embassy of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic Republic of Iran has officially commenced its activities" and has been operating since Sunday, the official news agency IRNA said, quoting an "informed source" at Iran's foreign ministry. There has been no

official confirmation from Riyadh on the move.

In June, Iran marked the reopening of its embassy in Riyadh with a flag-raising ceremony. Iranian media had previously attributed the delay in reopening the Saudi embassy to the poor condition of the building which was damaged during the 2016 protests. The reports said Saudi diplomats would work from a luxury hotel in the Iranian capital pending the completion of the works.

Since the March deal, Saudi Arabia has restored ties with Iranian ally Syria and ramped up a push for peace in Yemen, where it has for years led a military coalition against the Iran-backed Houthi forces. Iran and Saudi Arabia have backed opposing sides in conflict zones across the Middle East for years.

Iran has in recent months been at odds with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over the ownership of a disputed gas field. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait claim "sole ownership" to the field, with Iran warning it would "pursue its right" to the offshore zone if negotiations fail.

Meanwhile, a spate of high-profile visits by US officials to Saudi Arabia underscores how ties have warmed amid talks over a potential deal that would see the Gulf kingdom recognize the Zionist entity, analysts say. Less than a year after US President Joe Biden warned of unspecified "consequences" for Riyadh during a dispute over oil supply, he is dispatching top aides to meet Saudi royals at a rapid clip.

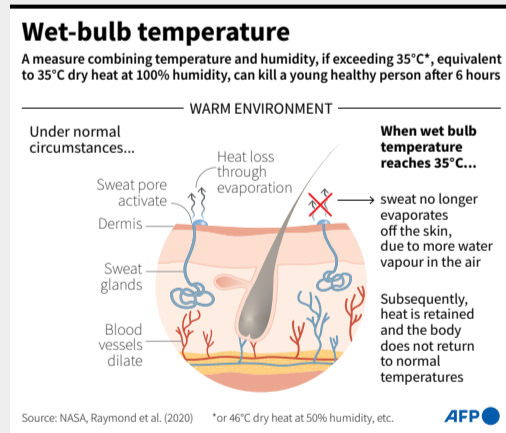
Over the weekend, his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, landed in Jeddah for a summit on Ukraine

— his third visit to Saudi Arabia in just a few months. While bilateral sessions — including during a three-day tour by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in June — have touched on topics from terrorism to Yemen, the prospect of normalizing Saudi-Zionist ties has been a mainstay agenda item, fueling rosier exchanges even if it is still seen as a long shot.

"US-Saudi ties have warmed unquestionably in recent months," said Ali Shihabi, a Saudi analyst close to the government. "Dialogue has just gotten much more extensive and friendly and this subject is driving that." The hurdles to an actual deal remain high: Riyadh is reportedly bargaining hard for benefits like security guarantees and assistance with a

**Continued on Page 6**

### The temperature the human body cannot survive



**PARIS:** Scientists have identified the maximum mix of heat and humidity a human body can survive. Even a healthy young person will die after enduring six hours of 35-degree Celsius warmth when coupled with 100 percent humidity, but new research shows that threshold could be significantly lower. At this point sweat — the body's main tool for bringing down its core temperature — no longer evaporates off the skin, eventually leading to heatstroke, organ failure and death.

This critical limit, which occurs at 35 degrees of what is known "wet bulb temperature", has only been breached around a dozen times, mostly in South Asia and the Arabian Gulf, Colin Raymond of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory told AFP. None of those instances lasted more than two hours, meaning there have never been any "mass mortality events" linked to this limit of human survival, said Raymond, who led a major study on the subject.

But extreme heat does not need to be anywhere near that level to kill people, and everyone has a different threshold depending on their age, health and other social and economic factors, experts say. For example, more than 61,000 people are estimated to have died due to the heat last summer in Europe, where there is rarely enough humidity to create dangerous wet bulb temperatures.

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### NIC's profitability confirms its solid position: Al-Kharafi

**KUWAIT:** The National Investment Company (NIC) has unveiled its financial results, recording a net profit of KD 3.2 million for the three months ended on June 30, 2023, with a 194 percent increase compared to the first quarter of this year which ended on March 31, 2023. In a statement to the press, NIC Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi stated the company had achieved positive financial results for H1 2023, which complements the all-round positive performance achieved in the last three and half decades and resulted in outstanding successes within its diverse activities.

This also placed NIC in the ranks of leading companies in Kuwait and the region and confirmed its position as one of the largest investment companies in terms of the volume of revenues and profitability, supported by positive results and its ability to maintain the interests of its clients at the forefront of their operations. Al-Kharafi also shed light on NIC's profitability maintained in the first half of this year. Even though financial markets have suffered instability, the company continued to take advantage of the opportunities in the operating environment in Kuwait and the region.

Al-Kharafi added that NIC's strategy is based on several foundations: Diversifying sources of income, reducing risks, diversity, and innovation to achieve sustainable growth based on a clear methodology. He also praised the efforts made by the company's executive team, which always works to translate the objectives of the Board of Directors to achieve the goals of shareholders and clients. (See Page 8)



### 11 killed in France holiday home blaze

**WINTZENHEIM, France:** Eleven people were killed in eastern France on Wednesday when a fire tore through a holiday lodging being used by a group of adults with learning disabilities, officials said. The fire at the timbered residence in the eastern town of Wintzenheim struck deep in the night while the guests were asleep, with many of those on the upper floor unable to react fast enough to save their lives.

The fire, which came at the height of the nation's summer holiday season, is the deadliest in France since a blaze at

a bar in the northern city of Rouen in 2016 killed 14 people. "Those on the ground floor are all alive and upstairs five people managed to escape. The eleven others died," regional deputy prosecutor Nathalie Kielwasser said at the scene. The fire brigade said six bodies had been brought out and two of them had already been identified. Intensive efforts were ongoing to extract the other corpses.

"The difficulty lies in accessing the affected levels, since there is a lot of rubble, a lot of collapsed parts and the stability of the floor is very uncertain," said Philippe Hauwiller, who was leading the fire brigade search operation. The local fire service told AFP authorities were alerted about the blaze in Wintzenheim, just outside the city of Colmar in the eastern Alsace region.

**Continued on Page 6**



### Gandhi slams inaction, govt refutes claims

**NEW DELHI:** India's opposition leader Rahul Gandhi condemned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inaction over deadly ethnic conflict in the country's north-east on Wednesday, in his first parliamentary speech since his defamation conviction was suspended. Modi's administration is being forced this week to defend its conduct over months of violence in Manipur state that has killed more than 150 people.

Gandhi's fiery address to the chamber was part of a no-confidence debate demanding the government's resignation for letting the unrest fester for months. "You are throwing kerosene in the whole country. You threw kerosene in Manipur, and lit a spark," Gandhi

said, with cheers from supporters and jeers from rival lawmakers. "You're set on burning the whole country. You are killing Mother India", he added.

Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is regularly accused by opponents of fomenting divisions for electoral purposes, and India will hold general elections early next year. The ruling BJP has a large majority in the 543-member lower house, and is expected to comfortably defeat the no-confidence vote, which it has dismissed as a headline-grabbing gimmick.

"India's army can bring in peace in one day but you're not using it," Gandhi told fellow lawmakers. "If Modi doesn't listen to the voice of India, then whose voice does he listen to?" Soldiers have been rushed in from other parts of India to contain the violence and a curfew and an Internet shutdown remain in force across most of Manipur. Modi confidant and India's powerful home minister Amit Shah told the

**Continued on Page 6**



# Oil minister promotes best health and safety standards

Barrak emphasizes the importance of securing oil facilities



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, and Acting Minister of Finance, Dr Saad Al-Barrak visits the headquarters of the Kuwait Oil Company on Wednesday. — KUNA photos



## The good bacteria: Vital tiny heroes

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Bacteria have often been associated with diseases and infections. However, there is a remarkable group of bacteria that plays a major role in maintaining our overall well-being — the “good bacteria”. While these tiny organisms may be invisible to the naked eye, their impact on our health cannot be underestimated. Thus, these good bacteria are becoming increasingly recognized as essential organisms in our quest for optimal health. To look deeper into the world of good bacteria, Kuwait Times interviewed probiotic researcher Khaled Al-Abdulghani.

**Kuwait Times:** What are good bacteria, and how do they differ from harmful bacteria?

**Khaled Al-Abdulghani:** The human body contains 100 trillion bacteria, which is equivalent to 10 times the cells of the human body, and there are 500 to 1,000 types of bacteria, which constitute 2 kilos of human weight. We acquire these bacteria from birth, from the mother's womb through the birth canal, bearing in mind that cesarean delivery babies acquire beneficial bacteria from the skin, which are not as efficient as bacteria acquired from the mother's womb. There are 80 percent beneficial bacteria and 20 percent harmful bacteria, and this ratio and balance must be maintained.

**Kuwait Times:** How do good bacteria contribute to the functioning of the immune system?

**Abdulghani:** Beneficial bacteria make up 80 percent of the immune system, and if the beneficial bacteria are fed according to the recommendations of the US FDA, 5 grams to 31 grams per day, we will maintain the efficiency and raise the performance of the immune system.

**Kuwait Times:** What are the potential benefits of consuming probiotic-rich foods or taking probiotic supplements?

**Abdulghani:** Probiotics are good bacteria and food for good bacteria. So, what we notice is there is a source and food for this source. Nutrition is more important than the source and the reason is due to the fact that the beneficial bacteria in the human body do not die since we acquired them from birth, but we only need nourishment in order for them to grow and multiply to reach the required balance.

**Kuwait Times:** How can good bacteria help in preventing or treating certain infections or diseases?

**Abdulghani:** If we enhance the good bacteria in the body by consuming probiotics, it will boost the immune system. Hence, the immune system will become capable to prevent and resist infections and diseases, either bacterial or viral.

**Kuwait Times:** Are there any potential side effects or precautions to consider when consuming or using products with good bacteria?

**Abdulghani:** Yes, because you are increasing the numbers of bacteria, which do not exceed 13 types. Our body has a range that goes from 500 to 1,000 types, and that causes disturbance of the harmonic work of probiotics in the body, according to a European Food Safety Authority report.

**Kuwait Times:** How can good bacteria be incorporated into everyday life for optimal health?

**Abdulghani:** By feeding the good or beneficial bacteria, which is in charge for both the digestive and immune systems, to enhance the short-chain fatty acid levels, which prevent us from all kinds of diseases.



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, and Acting Minister of Finance, Dr Saad Al-Barrak has stressed the importance of continuing the development of the human element and the best application used globally in the fields of health, safety, and environment to preserve the safety of workers.

This came in a statement by Minister Al-Barrak, quoted in a press release issued by the Kuwait

Petroleum Corporation after his visit to the headquarters of the Kuwait Oil Company on Wednesday. He discussed with the officials of the oil sector on the work of the corporation and its subsidiaries and the challenges facing the sector. He also reviewed the most prominent historical stations of Kuwait Oil and its achievements. Al-Barrak, who is also the chairman of the board, emphasizes the importance of securing oil facilities.

He affirmed his full support to the corporation

and its subsidiaries in order to overcome all obstacles that hinder the sector from carrying out its tasks fully, expressing his thanks and appreciation for the efforts of the oil sector workers and their constant dedication during the last financial year, during which distinctive profits were achieved. He pointed out the importance of working in a team spirit in order to achieve the strategy of the foundation and its subsidiaries for the benefit of Kuwait. — KUNA



Kuwait Foreign Minister visits regional center of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). — KUNA photos

## FM tours NATO Regional Center

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday visited the regional center of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), in the presence of Acting Head of the Kuwaiti National Security Apparatus (NSA) Sheikh Sabah Shamlan Abdulaziz Al-Sabah. During the visit, they were briefed on the work of the center and ways of enhancing cooperation and relations with the alliance and facilitating political dialogue between NATO countries and their partners in the Arab Gulf region, by creating a platform for discussion about security challenges at the regional and international levels. — KUNA



## FM receives head, members of Diwan for Human Rights

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday head of the National Diwan for Human Rights Jassem Al-Mubarak and members of the Diwan. The meeting focused on finding means to bolster the role of the Diwan in terms of protecting human rights and promoting the respect of public and private freedoms according to Kuwait's constitution and international conventions endorsed by the State of Kuwait. — KUNA



## MoI stresses facilitating movement of travelers

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas stressed the need to facilitate the movement of travelers, praising the efforts of airport security men, their efficiency and their ability to carry out the tasks and duties entrusted to them. This came in a statement by Barjas quoted in a press release issued by the interior ministry on Wednesday during a tour with Assistant Undersecretary for Ports and Border Security Maj Gen Mansour Al-Awadhi at T5 Airport to determine the level of readiness and procedures followed.

According to the statement, Barjas expressed his appreciation to all employees at the airport for their great role that highlights the honorable civilized face of Kuwait at the point of entry into the country. “First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah ordered to strengthen the



KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas and other top officials visit the T5 Airport.

numbers of women police at the airport from all sectors in the ministry during the summer period to carry out the tasks required,” he said.

At the beginning of the tour, Barjas was briefed on the mechanisms of the workflow and dealing

with congestion witnessed at the airport in the summer period, the procedures for departures and arrivals, then listened to a brief explanation of the mechanism of checking travelers to achieve a smooth movement of passengers.

## Local

# Supreme committee to review recruitment of security guards

## Committee proposes security jobs for retirees, bedoons

**KUWAIT:** The supreme committee for addressing demographics, headed by Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, asked the Cabinet to instruct government agencies to review the contracts of security companies, aimed at reviewing the conditions and controls through which they are contracted.

"The supreme committee included in

its request proposals calling for not relying on workers of security companies from a country that is almost the only one whose workers assume these jobs, as it will be required that employment in this field should be from other countries, especially since bringing in security workers from other countries contributes to reducing the number of large

expat communities in Kuwait, which is an important goal of the committee," sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

The sources indicated the committee also requested the contract should be with security companies whose workers are Kuwaitis, sons of Kuwaiti women, bedoons or Gulf nationals, with the aim of opening job opportunities for them,

"especially since they live in Kuwait and there is no need to bring in expatriate labor for these jobs".

"The committee asked the Cabinet to start preventing expatriates from working in guarding government schools for boys or girls, and instead employ Kuwaiti retirees, bedoons or sons of Kuwaiti or Gulf women," sources said,

indicating this will be the beginning of reducing the number of expat security guards in Kuwait. The sources indicated this move comes after violations and crimes committed by expatriates at security companies, as well the fact that many government agencies can use labor available in the country and there is no need for foreign recruitment.



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and other top officials visit Al-Adan Hospital.

## Minister of Health visits Adan Hospital

**KUWAIT:** Within the framework of the continuation of field follow-up of health facilities, the Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi visited Adan Hospital to see the progress of work, accompanied by the Undersecretary of General Services, Abdulaziz Al-Tasha, the Undersecretary for Engineering Affairs, Ibrahim Al-Naham, and the Director of the Technical Department at the Ministry of Health, Dr Nofa Al-Shammari. The minister was briefed on the progress of work within the hospital departments and the mechanisms used in the accident department to provide rapid response and immediate care to patients and to check on the progress of services provided to them.

On the sidelines of the tour, the minister held a meeting with the heads of the technical and administrative departments of Ahmadi Health District and Adan Hospital in the presence of the Director of Ahmadi Health District, the Director of the Hospital, and



the Head of Primary Health Care in the region. They discussed aspects of cooperation and coordination with the concerned sectors of the ministry. The minister also held talks with the heads of technical

departments on the challenges and obstacles facing them and highlighted proposals that would help overcome them in order to provide the best services to citizens and accelerate the pace of treatment.



Sara Mahmoud

## Ceramist discovers talent during COVID lockdown

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented shift in daily life, forcing people around the world to stay at home to curb its spread. This led to significant changes in how individuals allocated their time and energy. Sara Mahmoud, a 23-year-old ceramic artist, was one of the people who discovered their talent during the lockdown. Kuwait Times spoke with Mahmoud, who explained how she turned her passion into a small business she loves.

**Kuwait Times:** Tell us the background of your journey.

**Sara Mahmoud:** I started my journey in February 2020, a month before the lockdown. I booked a 12-class course at a local ceramic studio to learn wheel throwing. Unfortunately, I only took four of these classes before the lockdown. In December that same year, I found an alternative — I bought a clay kit and started hand-building at home, firing my pieces at a local studio. I loved the idea of creating handmade ceramics for my friends and family. I filmed my creation process and shared it online. I officially started selling my products in August 2021, nearly a year after doing it as just a hobby!

**Kuwait Times:** What led you into working with ceramics?

**Mahmoud:** Curiosity. I love trying new things, and this hobby stuck. I'm mostly self-taught, but my wheel-throwing beginnings were with a local instructor. I found wheel throwing very difficult and felt very discouraged after my course, so I stuck to hand building. I was later offered an exclusive membership at a ceramic studio, where I started practicing on the wheel again, and eventually got better by trial and a lot of error.

**Kuwait Times:** Who inspires you?

**Mahmoud:** Creators in all fields! I find myself subconsciously influenced and inspired by the love, time and effort they dedicate to their passion and craft.

**Kuwait Times:** How would you define the style of your work and how did it develop?

**Mahmoud:** Homey. I think most of my ceramic illustrations are based indoors, at home and in my natural habitat. My earlier illustrations were very bland and didn't express my art style; it developed into detailed illustrations once I understood the glazes I was working with.

**Kuwait Times:** What is on your mind when you are shaping an object?



**Mahmoud:** I spend an average of 5-6 hours in the studio six days a week. So I'm often left contemplating things. Yet, my productivity depends on my mood.

**Kuwait Times:** The colors of your pieces are one-of-a-kind. How did you develop your color palette and how does it change with time?

**Mahmoud:** I've always leaned more toward pink, green and purple. My summer collection has mainly bright colors, whereas my winter collections have darker colors, and pastels during spring. But I usually go back and forth mixing colors — it's my favorite part! I'm currently using white stoneware clay, but I'd love to work with porcelain in the future.

**Kuwait Times:** What advice would you give to beginners who want to learn pottery?

**Mahmoud:** Practice makes prog-

ress. Take your time exploring this craft — it's not the easiest to work with, but very rewarding.

**Kuwait Times:** What projects have you most enjoyed making?

**Mahmoud:** My 'homebody' collection. It's the first collection I worked on that has detailed illustrations. It was a push that made me understand my art style better.

**Kuwait Times:** What is your favorite piece? Why?

**Mahmoud:** My 'Relaxing is productive' mug. It's a reminder that taking time off is crucial to be productive.

**Kuwait Times:** Do you have a dream project?

**Mahmoud:** I dream of hosting my own clay workshop in the future. It would be lovely to meet people and share my love for ceramics with them — a joy shared is a joy doubled!

### News in Brief

#### Kuwaiti arrested at border

**KUWAIT:** Iraqi authorities arrested a Kuwaiti man who arrived at the Safwan Border Crossing without a passport. Security men at the Abdali port received the citizen from the Iraqi authorities, who had arrested him at the port after he tried to enter Iraq. He had no passport with him and was sent back to Kuwait territory. Investigations revealed that the citizen works with the Ministry of Interior and does not have permission to travel at that time. Officials have launched an investigation into how the citizen by passed the counters and security barriers at the Abdali port without being subject to procedures. "Instructions have been issued to prepare a comprehensive report on the incident," sources confirmed.

#### Saudi travelers killed

**KUWAIT:** A Saudi woman died in traffic accident after colliding with the lamppost in the Al-Zour area. The Saudi traveler entered Kuwait, and upon her arrival in the Al-Zour area, she collided with a lamppost. She was rushed to the hospital where she was confirmed dead. In another tragic incidence, a Saudi man died of a heart attack and his vehicle collided with the departure roundabout at Kuwait Airport.

#### Woman sentenced to life

**KUWAIT:** The Court of Cassation upheld the life sentence against a citizen who was accused of killing her daughter in Salmiya after leaving her body for 5 years until it decomposed. The court had previously charged the defendant with three charges, namely deliberately refraining from caring for her daughter, withholding her freedom, and violating the sanctity of the deceased. The defendant denied the charges and asserted that she saw her daughter (the victim) lying on the ground and was afraid to inform anyone. She was asked in a previous judicial session whether any of her sons were aware, and one of sons stood during the session and testified that his mother informed him that his sister was locked in a room. He said he threatened her mother and urged her to release his sister, but his mother told him that she has died. He then informed the police.

## KD 50m loan for Lebanese housing bank

**KUWAIT:** The Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of Banque de l'Habitat in Lebanon Antoine Habib announced the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development has given its final approval for a loan of KD 50 million (\$165 million) to Banque de l'Habitat. "The President of the Council for Development and Reconstruction Nabil Al-Jisr informed us that the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development gave its final approval for the loan to Banque de l'Habitat," Habib said.

"This final approval is followed by an agreement with the Central Bank of Lebanon so that the fund can start transferring the loan to the account allocated to it at the Central Bank after its entry into force. Thus, the loan agreement will become effective in the near future, to serve as a gift by the Arab Fund to the Lebanese people in this difficult economic and social period Lebanon is going through," he added.

Habib thanked Arab countries, especially Kuwait. "Kuwait always stood by Lebanon in the darkest circumstances and adversities, so it has solid and abundant support," he said. "This loan enables loans for about 6,000 housing units, ie 6,000 Lebanese families with limited and middle income. The Arab Fund has resumed lending funds to Banque de l'Habitat in US dollars, provided the loan ceiling is \$40,000 for low-income people and \$50,000 for middle-income people," he explained.

## Winners of Quran competition feted

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah confirmed the Ministry of Defense's (MoD) keenness to support competitions that encourage memorizing the Holy Quran. A ceremony was held under the auspices and presence of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad at the ministry's headquarters Wednesday morning, honoring the winners of the Quran recitation competition among workers, retirees and children of employees of the defense, interior, Kuwait National Guard and Kuwait Fire Force, which was organized by the Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations of Kuwaiti Armed Forces in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, MoD said in a press statement.

The ceremony began with the recitation of verses from the Quran, followed by a speech by the Director of Moral Guidance and Public Relations, Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Awadi, in which he appreciated the generous care and great interest that this competition received for this year from MoD, it added. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad distributed certificates and prizes to the winners and congratulated them in a speech on their victory, it stated.

This comes as a continuation of the state's efforts in caring for the Quran and its people, which concludes annually during the organization of the Kuwait International Award for Memorizing the Holy Quran, under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, it mentioned. Chief of the General Staff of the Army Major General Dr Ghazi Hassan Al-Shammari, Assistant Chief of the General Staff of the Administration and Manpower Authority Major General Dr Khaled Al-Kandari, and multiple commanding officers in the Kuwaiti army attended the ceremony. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah congratulates one of the winners. — KUNA

# KRCS sends urgent medical and food supplies to Sudan

## Kuwait Embassy in Cairo facilitating transfer of aid



**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Wednesday that it was coordinating with authorities in Egypt to deliver 190 tons of urgent medical and food supplies to Sudan. KRCS coordinator Khaled Al-Mutairi told KUNA that the Kuwaiti Embassy in Cairo would coordinate with the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) to deliver urgent relief aid material to Sudan. He affirmed that relief shipment would be handed to the Sudanese Red Crescent (SRC) and the Health Ministry for distribution.

"We are working in coordination with the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo and the Egyptian Red Cres-

cent Society to mobilize tons of foodstuffs, which include 12,000 food baskets destined for the most affected people by the repercussions of the crisis in Sudan," said Khaled Al-Mutairi.

"The shipment will also include about 95 tons of medical supplies and medicines, bringing the volume of Kuwaiti humanitarian aid that will provide the Sudanese people with about 190 tons of food and medical supplies," he clarified. Al-Mutairi talked about a coordination meeting held yesterday for this purpose between the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society to coordinate efforts and determine ways of delivering

Kuwaiti humanitarian aid that will be shipped to the port of Sudan in the Red Sea through the Egyptian port of Safaga.

The Kuwaiti aid will be delivered to the Sudanese Red Crescent Society and the Sudanese Ministry of Health in coordination with the Egyptian Red Crescent Society. Al-Mutairi expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo for its efforts in facilitating the transfer of aid and arranging with the Egyptian side for its shipment, as well as for the efforts made by the Egyptian Red Crescent Society in this context to help the needy and affected in Sudan. — KUNA



A delegation from the Tarahum Charity Association visits Benin, Uganda, and Togo.



## Tarahum makes humanitarian trip to Africa

**KUWAIT:** A delegation from the Tarahum Charity Association made a humanitarian trip to follow up on the implementation and opening of several projects in Benin, Uganda, and Togo. During the trip, the delegation visited important stations. The Executive Director of Tarahum Association for Charitable and Humanitarian Works, Abdulhamid Al-Dosari, said: "The visit witnessed the follow-up of educational advocacy projects such as mosques, Islamic centers,

classrooms, and the distribution of the Quran, as well as other developmental projects such as the distribution of sewing machines, dairy cows, motorcycles, and the shop project."

"The delegation also followed up on the opening of several health projects adopted by the association during the past years," he explained. He added that such humanitarian trips are a testimony to the generosity of the people of Kuwait, who contribute on a daily basis to alleviate the suffering of Muslims in Africa. This is evident in the water well projects that benefit thousands of needy people. "The delegation followed up on its implementation," he said. Al-Dosari valued the generosity and charity of the people of Kuwait, which was the reason for the implementation of these projects in their various variations, asking God Almighty to bless them and reward them.



## Arab meeting addresses women empowerment

**CAIRO:** The extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Arab Women's Committee kick started on Wednesday to examine issues related to the broad objective of empowering women. Ambassador Haifaa Abu Ghazala, the Arab League assistant secretary gener-

al for social affairs, said in a statement that the secretariat general places the empowerment of women among its priorities. The three-day meeting addresses issues related to the women empowerment and proposed recommendations that would be submitted to the Arab summit for economic and social development, due in Mauritania in November. Abu Ghazala added that the conferees would also discuss the strategic framework of the regional program for empowering women at the economic and social levels (2024-2030), an Arab task plan for encouraging business pioneering for the Arab females and the Arab women political empowerment. — KUNA



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Biden protects lands near Grand Canyon in environment push

## UN says reached deal with Syria over key aid crossing

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ZHUOZHOU: Local residents ride a scooter through a muddy street in the aftermath of flooding from heavy rains in Zhuozhou city, in northern China's Hebei province on August 9, 2023. — AFP

# Seven killed in SW China floods as record downpours pummel country

## Extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change, scientists say

BEIJING: Seven people were killed in flash floods in southwestern China on Wednesday, as authorities in Beijing tripled the death toll from the capital's heaviest-ever rains. China has been hit by record downpours in recent weeks, damaging infrastructure and deluging swaths of Beijing's suburbs and surrounding areas.

And in southwestern Sichuan province, flash flooding killed seven people on Wednesday, state media reported. The victims, who were reportedly taking pictures when the torrent struck, were tourists visiting a popular site. In Beijing, authorities said 33 had died, including two rescue workers, in the recent bad weather in the capital, mainly by flooding and buildings collapsing — three times the figure given by officials on Tuesday last week. "I would like to express my deep condolences to those who died in the line of duty and the unfortunate victims," Xia Linmao, Beijing's vice-mayor, told a news conference, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Scores have died in the floods across northern China, with Beijing officials saying on Friday 147 deaths

or disappearances last month were caused by natural disasters. Of those, 142 were caused by flooding or geological disasters, China's Ministry of Emergency Management said. Millions of people have been hit by extreme weather events and prolonged heatwaves around the globe in recent weeks, events that scientists say are being exacerbated by climate change.

### Sichuan torrent

Extreme weather has also struck in other parts of the country, with CCTV saying "local public security, fire and other departments are continuing to carry out search and rescue efforts" after the seven people were drowned in Sichuan's Longxi River. The flash flood occurred at about 10 am near an embankment southwest of the provincial capital of Chengdu, where "more than 10" people were swept away by an unexpected tide of water, state media said.

Video shared by CCTV showed several people struggling to keep their heads above water as a powerful torrent pushed them downstream and bystanders

shouted from the water's edge. The cause of the deluge was not immediately clear. Meteorological authorities in the nearby city of Qionglai issued a yellow warning for rain at 10:40 am on Wednesday, anticipating possible precipitation of "more than 50 mm" over the next six hours in certain parts of the administrative district.

### 'We might have drowned'

Fifteen people were reported to have died in Hebei province, which neighbors Beijing, and 22 were missing on Saturday. An AFP team in Hebei's Zhuozhou saw residents and workers clearing up debris and fixing damaged property on Wednesday, more than a week after rain started pummeling the region. "With my car that was washed away, the merchandise from my company and everything else, we've lost around a million yuan (\$140,000)," said a female villager who declined to give her name.

"Our little house isn't very high, so it's a good thing we realized the water was rising, otherwise we might have drowned," she said, adding she was waiting to

hear about compensation. Some in the area, meanwhile, were unhappy about victims speaking to foreign press. Before long, a man who introduced himself as "just a villager" ordered AFP journalists to leave.

"Nobody wants to talk to you here. Journalists have no right to be here if they are not sent by the government," he said. AFP reporters experienced a similar confrontation by a self-described "ordinary citizen" in the nearby town of Matou. Journalists do not require government permission to visit disaster zones in China.

Fourteen died and one person was reported missing in northeastern Jilin on Sunday. Further north in Heilongjiang, state media reported dozens of rivers had water levels rise above "warning markers" in recent days. "I still feel scared when I recall the recent flooding," Zheng Xiaokang, a police officer from the province's Jiangxi village, told the state-run Xinhua News Agency. "In the face of the persistent downpour and rising river water, the consequences would have been devastating had we not managed to timely evacuate the villagers," Zheng said. — AFP

## 41 migrants missing after new shipwreck in Mediterranean

ROME: Forty-one migrants including three children are feared dead after a shipwreck last week in the Mediterranean, UN agencies said, citing four survivors brought to the Italian island of Lampedusa Wednesday. Their metal boat overturned in bad weather during the night of Thursday to Friday after setting off from the Tunisian port of Sfax, said a joint statement from the UN agencies for refugees, children and migration.

The survivors — a 13-year-old boy on his own, a woman and two men — were rescued by a merchant ship and brought to Lampedusa by the Italian coast-guard, they said. In a separate statement, the Italian Red Cross, which manages the migrant reception center on the island, said the four were generally in good health.

They said they were from Ivory Coast and Guinea, and were unrelated to the missing migrants, it said. The four managed to survive the shipwreck by floating on inner tubes, before reaching another boat at sea. The shipwreck is one of several deadly incidents reported in recent days after a period of bad weather.

Officials on Monday had reported that 16 migrants died in shipwrecks off the coasts of Tunisia and Western Sahara. And on Sunday, the UN's migration agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said at least 30 people were missing after two shipwrecks off Lampedusa. The tiny island, located just 90 miles (around 145 kilometers) from Tunisia, is the first port of call for many migrants heading from North Africa to Europe. But many of them do not survive, making the Central Mediterranean migrant crossing the world's deadliest. — AFP

## Pakistan to hold election without ex-PM Khan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will have a new interim government in days after parliament concluded its last session late Wednesday, with an upcoming election that will not include the country's most popular politician, Imran Khan. The country has been in political turmoil since the former international cricket star was booted from power in April last year, culminating in his being jailed for graft at the weekend following a months-long crackdown on his party.

"In the past 16 months, our government tried its best to improve the situation and served the nation with full conviction," outgoing Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in his last address to the cabinet. "This country can't progress until we have national unity," he said. The new interim prime minister must be announced within three days of parliament's formal dissolution by the president, and elections held within 90 days—but the outgoing government has already warned they are likely to be delayed.

The unlikely coalition between Pakistan's usually feuding dynastic parties — which came together to kick out Khan — has won little popular support while at the helm of the world's fifth-most populous country. The economy is still in the doldrums despite a new International Monetary Fund bailout, with crippling foreign debt, soaring inflation and widespread unemployment from factories idled because they lack foreign currency to buy raw materials.

"Economic decisions are invariably tough and often unpopular, requiring a government with a longer tenure to effectively implement them," said Ahmed



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (9R in front row) poses for a group photograph with parliamentarians of the National Assembly outside the parliament house building in Islamabad on August 9, 2023. — AFP

Bilal Mehboob, president of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency think tank. "This election holds significance as it will result in a five-year term for a new government, which ideally should be empowered to make essential decisions vital for economic recovery."

### Election date question mark

There has been speculation for months that there could be a delay to elections as the establishment grapples to stabilize the country, which is facing overlapping security, economic and political crises. Data from the latest census carried out in May was finally

published at the weekend and the government says the election commission needs time to redraw constituency boundaries — a sore point for several political parties.

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, told AFP that any delay could give time to the main coalition partners, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), to figure out how to address the challenge of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. "But in reality, delaying the election could simply anger the public more and galvanize an opposition that has already suffered through months of crackdowns," he said. — AFP

## International

## UN says reached deal with Syria over key aid crossing

## Agreement can't guarantee aid reaching people most in need: Critics

**UNITED NATIONS:** The United Nations has said it reached agreement with the Syrian government on aid deliveries to rebel-held areas from Turkey, raising concern among relief groups who had wanted Damascus kept out. Under a 2014 deal, most international aid had passed through the Bab al-Hawa crossing from Turkey without the authorization of Damascus.

But last month, the UN Security Council failed to reach consensus on extending the mechanism, and the UN said a subsequent Syrian offer to keep the crossing open for another six months contained "unacceptable" conditions. Late Tuesday, a UN spokesperson said that "the secretary general welcomes the understanding reached yesterday (Monday) by the United Nations and the government of Syria on the continued use for the next six months of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing".

The deal followed engagement between UN humanitarian affairs chief Martin Griffiths and Damascus for the UN and its partners to keep providing assistance "at the necessary scale and in a principled manner that allows engagement with all parties ... and that safeguards the UN's operational independence", the statement said.

The Syrian government's previous conditions included that the UN cooperate with it fully and not communicate with "terrorist organizations" — a reference to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist group formerly affiliated with Al-Qaeda that controls the Syrian side of the Bab al-Hawa crossing. Several international organizations had expressed fear that allowing Damascus control over the flow of aid to rebel-held areas could result in limiting access to those most in need.

**Not 'tenable'**

More than four million people live in rebel-held ar-

reas of northern and northwestern Syria, many of them in overcrowded, impoverished displacement camps. "The consent reaffirmed by Syria in recent days provides a basis for the UN and its partners to lawfully conduct cross-border humanitarian operations through Bab al-Hawa," the UN statement said.

The International Rescue Committee voiced alarm at the announcement. "We are concerned that the removal of certainty and security provided by Security Council authorization will impact the ability of humanitarian organizations, and particularly Syrian NGOs, to operate effectively," the relief group said.

"The Security Council resolution was one guarantee that provided communities in the northwest some comfort knowing their access to lifesaving assistance was supported and protected by the international community." The IRC added that the deal's expiry in February "at the height of next year's winter season, raises significant concerns about the ability of the response to scale up to meet needs given the lack of predictability."

Hiba Zayadin from Human Rights Watch told AFP the arrangement was "not a tenable alternative for the UNSC (Security Council) resolution". "I don't see how such an agreement made with the very government that has long obstructed and weaponized aid can guarantee principled humanitarian aid delivery into the northwest," Zayadin added, urging the UN to "continue to look for alternatives".

**'Unacceptable'**

The UN announcement came just hours after it said Syria had extended for another three months the use of two other crossings — Bab al-Salama and Al-Rai — opened following a devastating February 6 earthquake. Civil war broke out in Syria after President Bashar

Secretary of State Antony Blinken just months earlier paid a highest-ranking visit ever by a US official to Niger. He saluted gains under the elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, who was an honored guest both at democracy and Africa summits thrown by President Joe Biden. US policymakers see no Russian hand in the coup but point to Russian influence operations since then, including French-language social media postings and rallies in support of the military takeover.

Playing on resentment of former ruler France, Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin in a purported audio message hailed the coup as "nothing more than the struggle of the people of Niger against colonizers." In an interview with the BBC, Blinken said that Bazoum's ouster was "not instigated by Russia or by Wagner," but warned that Wagner would "try to take advantage of it."

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller brushed aside suggestions of pro-Moscow sentiment after Russian flags appeared in demonstrations in Niger. "I think it's very strange that if your country is taken over by a military junta and you want to show your support, the way you decide to do that is by running out and buying — I guess at a store locally — a Russian flag," Miller said.

Cameron Hudson, an Africa expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the coup showed the West had made incorrect judgments on Niger, where France and the United States together have

position to do. Yet it is important not to exaggerate any slip in Washington's status, Alghannam added.

"No major power has a significant military presence in the region other than the US, and this will be the case for many years to come," he said, a point driven home by the recent deployment of 3,000 US military personnel to the Red Sea, part of a beefed-up response after tanker seizures by Iran.

During last October's dust-up over oil production, both sides were rankled by the stern exchanges that ensued, said John Hannah, a former US senior foreign policy official who has been visiting the kingdom for three decades. "It extended to the point of very senior (Saudi officials) saying, 'OK, you may be re-evaluating the relationship and may have questions about the future of this partnership, but let us tell you we do as well,'" Hannah recalled.

Even then, though, a genuine rupture was never seriously considered, as the Saudis were simultaneously pitching normalization terms that would lock in long-term cooperation with Washington. The recent flurry of visits and "serious discussions aimed at taking security ties to new levels" indicate "a much improved atmosphere between top decision makers", said Hannah, now with the Jewish Institute for National Security of America.

The new US-Saudi closeness has not gone unnoticed elsewhere, including among Palestinian officials who hope Riyadh will insist on an independent Palestinian state. "I hope that the Saudis will stick to that position and not yield to any kind of pressure, intimidation, coming from the Biden administration or any other power outside of that," Palestinian foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki said last week. — AFP

three former prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru. Congress was once India's dominant political force but Gandhi has led it to two landslide defeats against the BJP and its nationalistic appeals to the country's Hindu majority.

Shah, in his remarks, suggested that the no-confidence vote was yet another attempt to relaunch Gandhi's political career. Gandhi and his allies are attempting to stitch together a grand coalition of opposition parties ahead of next year's national elections, in which Modi will seek a third successive term.

At least 152 people have been killed in Manipur since May, Shah told parliament, with armed clashes breaking out between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki community. The state has fractured on ethnic lines, with rival militias setting up blockades to keep out members of the opposing community.

Gandhi accused the government of having "broken" Manipur "into two parts", but Irani insisted the state was "not divided". Shah, meanwhile, maintained the flare-up was due to an influx of narcotics and thousands of tribal refugees fleeing a crackdown in neighboring military-ruled Myanmar. — AFP



In this file photo workers unload bags of aid at a warehouse near the Syrian Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey, on July 10, 2023. — AFP

al-Assad's government crushed peaceful protests in 2011. The conflict has killed more than half a million people and driven half of the country's pre-war population from their homes.

Russia last month vetoed a nine-month extension of the Bab al-Hawa mechanism then failed to muster enough votes to adopt a six-month extension. Damascus regularly denounces the UN aid deliveries as a violation of its sovereignty. Its ally Moscow has been

chipping away at the Security Council deal for years. The White Helmets rescue group, which operates in the northwest, said the UN had "ignored the demands and pleas" of Syrians and allowed the government to control cross-border aid into the opposition bastion. "Placing the fate of life-saving aid for millions of innocent people in the hands of those who killed them, forced them from their homes and robbed them of their rights is unacceptable," it said on social media. — AFP

## US seeks to stop new Russian gain in coup-hit Niger

**WASHINGTON:** The United States is seeking to prevent Russia from scoring a major new win with coup-hit Niger, vowing despite initial disappointment that long-standing military ties will keep the country in the Western orbit. Niger has been the linchpin of US and French anti-jihadist operations in the Sahel, especially since the military takeover of neighboring Mali, which has shown the door to Western forces and welcomed Russia's ruthless Wagner mercenary force.

Victoria Nuland, the acting deputy secretary of state, on an unannounced visit to Niamey on Monday acknowledged little progress on reversing the July 26 coup but said that the military leaders "understand very well the risks to their sovereignty when Wagner is invited in." She said that her main interlocutor, the newly named military chief of staff Brigadier General Moussa Salaou Barnou, has worked closely with US Special Forces and that she went into detail on "aspects of our cooperation that he has historically cared about a lot." "So we are hopeful that that will sink in," she said.



NIAMEY: Bags of rice are offloaded from a truck at Niamey's main market on August 8, 2023. — AFP

stationed some 2,500 troops. "I think Washington was operating under the impression that they were engaged with a very reliable Western partner," he said.

But Hudson said Niger was different from the Wagner strongholds of Mali and the Central African Repub-

lic, which both turned to the Russians after sensing an "existential threat." He said that Niger's military, by contrast, appears happy to preserve relations with the United States — which instead has suspended aid and demanded restoration of the constitutional order. — AFP

## Saudi embassy resumes...

## Continued from Page 1

civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment capacity. And Saudi officials have long vowed not to normalize relations with the Zionist entity before the conflict with the Palestinians has been resolved. All the same, coordination between Washington and Riyadh is today "better now than at any point in the last two years", said Hesham Alghannam of the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh. "It's much warmer and closer. It's not perfect, but it's the best moment since President Biden came into office."

The issues bedeviling the decades-old relationship are well-known, from flare-ups over human rights to Saudi concerns about Washington's reliability as a security partner. Those concerns took on new importance after attacks on Saudi oil facilities in 2019, claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels but widely attributed to Iran, temporarily halved crude output. Saudi officials were deeply disappointed by the tepid response of then-US president Donald Trump's administration, which they believed undermined their traditional oil-for-security trade-off.

Growing cooperation with Moscow and Beijing highlights how, as Alghannam put it, Riyadh is no longer content to place "all the eggs in the American basket". The Saudis also leaned on China to broker a landmark rapprochement with Iran announced in March, something the Biden administration was in no

## Gandhi slams inaction, govt refutes...

## Continued from Page 1

parliament that Manipur had seen "a destructive dance of violence". "No one can deny that. But your political moves on the issue are equally shameful," he said in a jab at the opposition. Government minister Smriti Irani refuted Gandhi's allegations, saying the party was always ready to discuss the Manipur issue in parliament. "They ran away from the discussion, not us," Irani said. "Rahul Gandhi said kerosene has been poured all over the country. And where all did you go to find the matchbox, Rahul Gandhi?" she added.

Gandhi, 53, the son of India's premier political dynasty, was restored to parliament on Monday after the Supreme Court last week suspended his defamation conviction over comments criticizing Modi. He 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.

Gandhi is the son, grandson and great-grandson of

## 11 killed in France holiday...

## Continued from Page 1

at around 6:30 am (0430 GMT). "The fire was quickly brought under control despite the intensity of the flames," the prefecture the Haut-Rhin region said in a statement.

It said 17 people were safely evacuated, with one person hospitalized and another treated for shock. Those staying at the center were part of a group of adults with learning difficulties, some of whom had come to the picturesque and hilly region from the nearby city of Nancy for the holidays. "In Wintzenheim, the flames ravaged a lodging which accommodated people with disabilities and their companions. In the face of this tragedy, my thoughts go out to the victims, to the injured and to their loved ones," French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on Twitter, which is being rebranded as X.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, who went to the scene, expressed her "sadness" over the "appalling" disaster. The secretary general of the Haut-Rhin prefecture in eastern France, Christophe Marot confirmed a total of 28 people had been inside at the

time, with the 11 initially reported as unaccounted for. "Unfortunately, there is little doubt: All these people were present in the lodging and could not get out," he told reporters.

People on the ground floor were able to quickly leave the premises but not those upstairs, he said. The missing and confirmed dead included 10 people with light learning difficulties and one supervisor, he said. Marot said there was no indication over the cause of the blaze and added an investigation would be opened by regional prosecutors.

Kielwasser said the owner of the residence, who lived opposite, was being questioned by police. "She is extremely shocked, she is the one who set off the alert and heard the victims calling for help," she added. Deputy mayor Daniel Leroy said the residents were "taken by surprise in deep sleep, everyone was asleep". The guesthouse "has been running for several years without problems," he added.

The traditional semi-timbered building, built in the style of the Alsace region, was severely damaged by the fire, according to the firefighters. The firefighters were dousing the scene of the disaster with the help of fire hoses, an AFP photographer said. The roof was consumed by the flames and, on the first floor, the charred wooden framework was visible. Other firefighters were clearing wreckage away from the scene of the disaster with smoke still rising. — AFP

## The temperature the human body...

## Continued from Page 1

But as global temperatures rise — last month was confirmed on Tuesday as the hottest in recorded history — scientists warn that dangerous wet bulb events will also become more common. The frequency of such events has at least doubled over the last 40 years, Raymond said, calling the increase a serious hazard of human-caused climate change. Raymond's research projected that wet bulb temperatures will "regularly exceed" 35C at several points around the world in the coming decades if the world warms 2.5C degrees above preindustrial levels.

Though now mostly calculated using heat and humidity readings, wet bulb temperature was originally measured by putting a wet cloth over a thermometer and exposing it to the air. This allowed it to measure how quickly the water evaporated off the cloth, representing sweat off of skin. The theorized human survival limit of 35C wet bulb temperature represents 35C of dry heat as well as 100 percent humidity — or 46C at 50 percent humidity.

To test this limit, researchers at Pennsylvania State University in the United States measured the

core temperatures of young, healthy people inside a heat chamber. They found that participants reached their "critical environmental limit" — when their body could not stop their core temperature from continuing to rise — at 30.6C wet bulb temperature, well below the previously theorized 35C. The team estimated that it would take between five to seven hours before such conditions would reach "really, really dangerous core temperatures," Daniel Vecellio, who worked on the research, told AFP.

Joy Monteiro, a researcher in India who last month published a study in Nature looking at wet bulb temperatures in South Asia, said that most deadly heatwaves in the region were well below the 35C wet bulb threshold. Any such limits on human endurance are "wildly different for different people," he told AFP. "We don't live in a vacuum — especially children," said Ayesha Kadir, a pediatrician in the UK and health advisor at Save the Children. Small children are less able to regulate their body temperature, putting them at greater risk, she said.

Older people, who have fewer sweat glands, are the most vulnerable. Nearly 90 percent of the heat-related deaths in Europe last summer were among people aged over 65. People who have to work outside in soaring temperatures are also more at risk. Whether or not people can occasionally cool their bodies down — for example in air conditioned spaces — is also a major factor. — AFP

## International

# Biden protects lands near Grand Canyon in environment push

## National monument status to prohibit new uranium mining projects on site

**GRAND CANYON:** Joe Biden used the backdrop of the Grand Canyon Tuesday to champion the climate fight — and distinguish himself from the Republican right — by designating large swathes of surrounding sacred land with protective status. The US president, kicking off a three-day tour of the American southwest, pumped his fist after signing into existence the country's newest national monument, with Native Americans dressed in traditional outfits and headdresses standing at his side.

"Folks, preserving these lands is good not only for Arizona (and) for the planet. It's good for the economy, it's good for the soul of the nation," said Biden, shielded from the sun by his cap and dark sunglasses as he spoke before a landscape of grasses, shrubs and juniper-dotted hillsides. The national monument — which designates that the area's natural wealth, historical significance and economic interest have earned it special protection status — is a place of unique biodiversity that has long been cherished by local Native American tribes. The groups hold it in high spiritual significance and have sought curbs on mining activity around the sweeping, spectacular river valley for decades.

### 'Our ancestral footprints'

The territory created Tuesday will be known as Baaj Nwaavjo Itah Kukveni — Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon. The name is derived from phrases in the languages of the Havasupai Indians and the Hopi, which translate to "where Indigenous peoples roam" and "our ancestral footprints." It will conserve nearly one million acres (about 405,000 hectares) made up of three distinct areas surrounding the Grand Canyon, an immense gorge up to 6,000 feet (1,800 meters) deep carved over millennia by the Colorado River into endless strata of colorful rock.

According to the White House, the area's protected status will now prohibit new uranium mining

projects on the site, without affecting existing mining rights. Grassroots environmental group the Sierra Club hailed Biden's move as a "historic step" that safeguards traditional use and "ensures these lands will be protected for generations to come."

Biden was due to enjoy his own moment of contemplation Tuesday at the rim of the nearby Grand Canyon, an iconic landscape of the American West that he hailed as a "national treasure." The world-famous tourist attraction was formalized as a national park in 1919. "There's more work ahead to combat the existential threat of climate change," the Democrat said.

The visit comes as southwestern states, Arizona in particular, bake under a brutal, record-setting heat wave and drought crisis. Biden, who at age 80 is seeking a second term in the 2024 presidential election, is also using the trip to set himself apart from the Republican opposition.

Referring in part to Indigenous tribes driven from their lands, Biden castigated unnamed officials in some conservative-run states who "seek to ban books and bury history." He also criticized the most radical forces in the Republican Party for "trying to undo" a centerpiece of his first term in office, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) — a landmark law for boosting green investment — that he signed into law last August.

### Failure to act

The White House is keen to mark the anniversary of this mammoth package of climate investments and other programs, which Biden described Tuesday as largest climate bill "in the history of the world." Biden regularly describes climate change as an existential threat, and criticizes his Republican opponents for failure to act on the issue.

Among Biden's climate pledges is to halve the country's CO2 emissions by 2030. "We're well on our way," he proclaimed Tuesday, even as many experts, while applauding the Democrat's initia-



**TUSAYAN:** US President Joe Biden (center) gestures after signing a proclamation to designate Baaj Nwaavjo Itah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument, at Red Butte Airfield, 25 miles (40kms) south of Tusayan, Arizona, on August 8, 2023. — AFP

tives, say that aspirational deadline won't be met.

The IRA funnels some \$370 billion into subsidies for America's energy transition, including tax breaks for US-made electric vehicles and batteries — domestic incentives that have irked US trading partners. Biden will be emphasizing new factories and his "Bidenomics" economic agenda on Wednesday when he visits New Mexico, followed by a Thursday trip to Utah, where he will

highlight programs that help military veterans.

Utah is represented in the US Senate by Mitt Romney, who strongly condemned Biden's national monument for limiting new uranium mining. "By eliminating this important source of uranium, President Biden has increased both our dependence on Russia and China and our ultimate carbon footprint, while decreasing our energy efficiency," Republican Romney said in a statement. — AFP

## El Nino could imperil Australia's Great Barrier Reef

**SYDNEY:** Australia's Great Barrier Reef could deteriorate if warming ocean temperatures spark another mass coral bleaching event later this year, the country's top marine science body said Wednesday. Sections of the reef had been showing promising signs of recovery until a bleaching event in 2022 turned swathes of the vibrant coral a sickly, pale white.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science said that, although the reef's condition had stabilized during a "relatively mild" summer in 2023, it remained in a precarious position. Institute research director David Wachenfeld said the reef was at "increased risk with climate change driving more frequent and severe bleaching events."

Australia's weather bureau has said it is "likely" an El Nino weather pattern will develop over the country in the coming weeks, bringing warmer ocean temperatures to the Pacific—and the renewed risk of coral bleaching. Globally, the average ocean temperature

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

Wachenfeld said the reef was "only one large-scale disturbance away from a rapid reversal of recent recovery". Australia was given a brief reprieve earlier this year when a team of United Nations experts left the fading wonder off a list of heritage sites considered "in danger". The reef is one of Australia's premier tourist drawcards and putting it on the in-danger list could substantially tarnish its allure for international visitors.

World heritage body UNESCO considered listing the reef after a damning report in 2021 but held off

following intense lobbying from Australia's previous conservative government. Instead, UNESCO has set up a monitoring mission within Australia to assess the impact of pollution, fishing, climate change and coral bleaching. It first raised the alarm about the reef's deterioration in 2010.

Marine heatwaves have caused mass coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef in 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2022. Researcher Mike Emslie said even the most minor bleaching event was enough to "put the brakes" on the reef's recovery. "This means the reef is still at risk of decline from more frequent disturbances," he said. — AFP

## Why ethnic violence erupted in India's Manipur

**NEW DELHI:** At least 120 people have been killed since May in armed clashes in Manipur, a remote state in northeast India with a history of ethnic conflict. Soldiers were rushed in from other parts of the country to contain the violence, and months later a curfew and internet shutdown remain in force across most of the state.

Thousands of guns were stolen when the unrest began, and militia groups on both sides of the state's ethnic divide are hunkering down for a protracted fight. Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week faces a no-confidence motion in parliament over the violence, with the opposition accusing him of inaction. AFP looks at the origins of the conflict and its consequences:

### Why did the latest violence start?

The dispute stems from animosity between Manipur's Meitei majority and the Kuki, one of several tribal groups in the state that make up about 16 percent of its population. The Meitei are predominantly Hindu and largely live in urban centers, while the mainly Christian Kuki usually live in scattered settlements in the state's hills.

Longstanding tensions between the two communities have revolved around competition for land and public jobs, with rights activists accusing local leaders of exacerbating ethnic divisions for political gain. Things came to a head in May over plans to recognize the Meitei as a "Scheduled Tribe" — a status already conferred upon the Kuki.

This would grant them a form of affirmative action through guaranteed quotas of government jobs and college admissions. Kuki groups staged protests over fears the plans could reduce their own entitlements, with rallies quickly spiraling into violence. Protesters set fire to vehicles and buildings, and Meitei mobs armed with guns and petrol cans then attacked Kuki settlements in the hills.

### What has happened since?

Mobs looted police stations when the clashes began, with 3,000 weapons and 600,000 rounds of



**IMPHAL:** Women shout slogans as they protest over the atrocities against Meitei women in Imphal on August 7, 2023, following ongoing ethnic violence in the north-eastern Manipur state. — AFP

ammunition going missing according to the Press Trust of India news agency. The state has fractured on ethnic lines, with rival Meitei and Kuki militias setting up blockades to keep out members of the opposing community.

Clashes have killed at least 120 people, though many in Manipur believe the number could be higher. Some 50,000 people have been forced to flee their homes, taking shelter in relief centers or nearby states. Reprisal attacks have seen the firebombing of homes and places of worship. More than 220 churches and 17 Hindu temples had been destroyed by the end of July, according to a report by India Today news magazine.

### Has Manipur seen unrest before?

Manipur is one of seven northeast Indian states — sandwiched between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar

— that have long been a hotbed of separatism and a tinderbox of tensions between different ethnic groups. An armed rebellion broke out against Indian rule in the late 1970s by Manipuri militants who said the region had been largely neglected by New Delhi, with daily armed attacks on government facilities.

Around 20 militant groups were active in Manipur during the peak of the insurgency, with more than 10,000 people losing their lives in the two decades to 2010. But the state has been relatively calm since the last major rebel attack in 2015, when an ambush on a military convoy killed around 20 soldiers. The latest violence has revived calls among the Kuki to be granted a separate state administration. This demand has been rejected outright by the Meitei, who make up more than half of the state's 2.8 million population, according to India's last census in 2011. — AFP

Kwok said she would continue to resist and called on Hong Kongers to confront fears stemming from the political environment.

"I choose to overcome my fear and continue to seize the initiative for my life," she said. Kwok's parents were allowed to leave the police station after questioning on Tuesday and were not arrested, according to local media. The bounties issued by Hong Kong police have incited an outcry from the United States, Britain and Australia — all countries where the eight activists are living. — AFP

## Wanted Hong Kong activist says parents 'harassed'

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Anna Kwok said Wednesday that her parents were "questioned, harassed and intimidated" by authorities, weeks after officials accused her and seven others of endangering national security. Hong Kong last month offered

bounties of HK\$1 million (\$128,000) for information leading to the arrest of eight prominent democracy activists now living abroad, accusing them of subversion, foreign collusion, and other crimes.

Police confirmed to AFP that its national security department on Tuesday "took away a man and a woman for investigation" related to national security crimes, without naming them. Kwok, executive director of the non-profit Hong Kong Democracy Council, apologized Wednesday to her parents in a statement for getting them involved.

"Yesterday my parents were questioned, harassed and intimidated. Even though I feel apologetic, I must say this is a price I expected to pay," said Kwok, who is based in the United States. Family members of at least four other wanted activists — former lawmaker Nathan Law, unionist Mung Siu-tat, lawyer Dennis Kwok, and activist Elmer Yuen — have been taken in for police questioning over the past weeks.

Police also arrested at least seven people in Hong Kong with ties to the now-disbanded political group Demosisto, which Law used to lead.



**BELEM:** Indigenous people from Amazon countries and members of social movements take part in the March of the Peoples of the Earth for the Amazon in Belém, Para State, Brazil, on August 8, 2023. — AFP

## Amazon nations launch alliance to fight deforestation

**BELEM:** The closely watched summit of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) adopted what host country Brazil called a "new and ambitious shared agenda" to save the Amazon rainforest, a crucial buffer against climate change that experts warn is being pushed to the brink of collapse.

The group's members — Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela — signed a joint declaration in Belém, at the mouth of the Amazon River, laying out a nearly 10,000-word roadmap to promote sustainable development, end deforestation and fight the organized crime that fuels it.

But the summit stopped short of environmentalists' and Indigenous groups' boldest demands, including for all member countries to adopt Brazil's pledge to end illegal deforestation by 2030 and Colombia's pledge to halt new oil exploration. "It's a first step, but there isn't a concrete decision, just a list of promises," said Marcio Astrini, head of the Brazil-based Climate Observatory coalition.

"The planet is melting, temperature records are being broken every day ... it is not possible for eight Amazonian leaders to fail to put in a declaration in bold letters that deforestation must be zero," he added. In his opening speech of the two-day summit, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva emphasized that the "severe worsening of the climate crisis" required action "in unison."

"It has never been so urgent," he said in remarks just hours after the European Union's climate observatory confirmed July had been the hottest month ever recorded. Colombian President Gustavo Petro meanwhile called for a massive program to cancel developing countries' debt in exchange for action to protect the climate, linking the idea to the post-World War II "Marshall Plan." "If we're on the verge of extinction and this is the decade when the big decisions have to be made... then what are we doing, besides giving speeches?" he said.

### Vital carbon sink

Seeking to pressure the gathered heads of state, hundreds of environmentalists, activists and Indigenous demonstrators marched to the conference venue in Belém, urging bold action. It is the first summit in 14 years for the eight-nation group, set up in 1995 by the South American countries that share the Amazon basin.

Home to an estimated 10 percent of Earth's biodiversity, 50 million people and hundreds of billions of trees, the vast Amazon is a vital carbon sink, reducing global warming. But scientists warn the destruction of the rainforest is pushing it dangerously close to a tipping point, beyond which trees would die off and release carbon rather than absorb it, with catastrophic consequences for the climate. — AFP

## Business

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2023

# NIC's profitability indicators confirm its solid financial position: Al-Kharafi

## Company records a net profit of KD 4.2 million, 5.3 fils per share for H1 2023



NIC Chairman  
Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

- The National Investments Company maintained positive profitability rate indicators, confirming its solid financial position and dense foundation.
- The figures confirm NIC's ability to maintain reasonable revenues and client profitability.
- The company is taking proactive steps towards developing operating profits by focusing on core investment activities and asset management services via seizing investment opportunities.



NIC CEO and Board Member  
Fahad Al-Mukhaizim

- Our investment funds recorded impressive performance compared to other local funds established in Kuwait.
- We have attracted several investors during the first half of this year, provided notable advisory services, and managed mergers and acquisitions, sales and restructurings, private placements, and listings on Boursa Kuwait.

**KUWAIT:** The National Investment Company (NIC) has unveiled its financial results, recording a net profit of KD 3.2 million for the three months ended on 30 June, 2023, with a 194 percent increase compared to the first quarter of this year which ended on 31 March, 2023.

In a statement to the press, NIC Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi stated that the company had achieved positive financial results for H1 2023, which complements the all-round positive performance achieved in the last three and half decades and resulted in outstanding successes within its diverse activities. This also placed NIC in the ranks of leading companies in Kuwait and the region and confirmed its position as one of the largest investment companies in terms of the volume of revenues and profitability, supported by positive results and its ability to maintain the interests of its clients at the forefront of their operations.

### Solid financial position

Al-Kharafi also shed light on NIC's profitability maintained in the first half of this year. Even though financial markets have suffered instability, the company continued to take advantage of the opportunities in the operating environment in Kuwait and the region.

NIC's strategic approach led to achieving favorable levels in profitability indicators, efficiency of the operational performance, the contribution of sectors in operational processes, and the disciplined implementation of the company's strategy. All factors helped achieve a balance through the ability to manage financials, and prudent risk management, in addition to the solid structure that symbolizes NIC and has a clear impact on achieving the desired strategic objectives.

Al-Kharafi added that NIC's strategy is based on several foundations: diversifying sources of income, reducing risks, diversity, and innovation to achieve sustainable growth based on a clear methodology. He also praised the efforts made by the company's executive team, which always works to translate the objectives of the Board of Directors to achieve the goals of shareholders and clients.

### Financial indicators

Commenting on the financial indicators of NIC, Al-Kharafi reviewed the positive results achieved by the company during the first half of 2023, which reflect its wise strategy. Despite the change in interest rates in the region and globally, which led to a decline of GCC market indices, by -4.1 percent in Kuwait, -2.3 percent in the UAE, and -6.6 percent in Qatar during the first half of 2023, the company continues to maintain a net financial profit of KD 4.2

million and an earnings per share of 5.3 fils per share since the beginning of 2023.

Al-Kharafi also mentioned that assets under management had reached KD 1.078 billion by the end of H1 2023, and the total shareholders' equity of the parent company had reached KD 176 million.

"The total assets decreased by 6.6 percent to KD 244 million at the end of the second quarter of 2023, compared to KD 261 million in total assets at the end of the first quarter, due to the company's distribution of approximately KD 22.3 million cash dividends for the year 2022," added Al-Kharafi.

"We extend our thanks to our shareholders for their continuous support and unwavering trust. As a company, we also value the loyalty of our clients throughout the years and their engagement with the services tailored to match their needs and expectations. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the regulatory authorities for their ongoing support and to our executive management for their commitment to our company's vision and customer service strategy, emphasizing systematic work. Special thanks to our dedicated employees for their efforts in achieving growth and successfully implementing strategic objectives, leading NIC to become one of the region's largest companies" concluded Al-Kharafi.

On the Corporate Social Responsibility front, NIC has intensified its strategic efforts as part of its annual program. It has played an essential role in this sector for over 35 years, offering support to people in need as a matter of social solidarity. Most recently, in cooperation with Kuwait Food Bank and Relief, NIC provided support to those in need during the holy month of Ramadan, an initiative which is in line with the company's key objective to support activities that contribute to the development of society in its various humanitarian, social, and educational fields in addition to the field of sports.

### Selective management and study

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim, Board Member and CEO of National Investments Company, said: "We ended the first half of this year with positive results, as we focused on keeping pace with and meeting customers' changing needs, offering the best services, which are tech-driven. The results also confirmed the success of the company's plans within all the sectors, which positively impacted increasing those wishing to invest in distinguished opportunities, as well as through investment portfolios managed by the company for individuals and institutions locally and globally."

On the performance of the MENA Securities Sector, Al-Mukhaizim pointed out that the first half of 2023 was distinguished by the respectable version

of the investment equity funds, which reflects the extent of excellence and success of the management in adopting strategies aimed at achieving financial returns for the company's customers and its superiority over its counterparts in the market.

"Despite the factors driving market fluctuations and concerns related to global and local political and economic conditions, the most important of which are global political tensions and conflicts, weak expectations regarding global economic growth, high global inflation rates, and the continued tightening of monetary policy by the Federal Reserve by raising interest rates to control inflation, however, some of our investment funds have achieved good performance compared to the rest of the local funds established in Kuwait, thanks to rational decisions and prudent management of funds, and making investment decisions consistent with good and wise investment practices in achieving rewarding returns for unit-holders by investing in shares of preferred companies with rewarding returns, solid management and a clear future vision, which had a significant impact on stability at the level of its cash distributions and grants," said Al-Mukhaizim.

He said that Zajil Services and Telecommunications Fund achieved a positive performance of 12.76 percent. Al-Mada Investment Fund and Mawarid Fund for Industrial and Petroleum Services Fund achieved a positive performance of 5.23 percent and 4.94 percent, respectively.

Al-Mukhaizim also highlighted that NIC was able to expand its portfolio as a Market Maker by adding Al-Safat Investment Company and renewing the contracts of KAMCO, ALARGAN International Real Estate Company, and Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company; and now offers the service to 11 shares of companies listed on Boursa Kuwait while effectively achieving the turnover and liquidity rates required on those shares.

### Successful deals

Al-Mukhaizim also praised the exceptional performance and efforts of the Financial Advisory Services Department and thanks to the company's extensive network and strategic vision in attracting investments and distinguished advisory services and successfully managing many private placements and qualitative listings on Boursa Kuwait. An IPO was completed with a capital increase of Rai Media Group with a total value of \$4.4 million. NIC has also contracted with Aleid Foods Company K.P.S.C. as an underwriting agent to increase its capital and investment advisor for the potential acquisition. The team also succeeded in hiring two companies operating in the food and beverage sector to sell strategic stakes in them, advising a holding company on a partial

purchase to acquire a minority stake in a company listed on Boursa Kuwait.

The Alternative Investments team is now auditing Europe's venture capital fund manager, which includes a solid technical team. Our team is constantly looking for real estate and direct investment opportunities that show promising potential for rewarding returns. We also work on our current real estate investments per the expected plan, confirming their stability and positive expectations.

"The Wealth Management Sector continued to achieve important accomplishments during the first half of 2023, working on expanding the company's customer base and attracting investors and new capital of approximately KD 20 million. In addition to achieving growth in the number of new investment portfolios by 16 percent for the first half of this year and applying many practices that helped develop and improve investor service and keep pace with the latest technologies followed within the sector," said Al-Mukhaizim.

The positive continuation witnessed by the real estate investment sector in maintaining the high occupancy rates in the company's properties to unprecedented rates of 100 percent in some properties and working on renting the vacant units. The sector succeeded in obtaining new real estate management contracts: real estate portfolios also increased with several additional properties managed by the sector, accompanied by a 4.5 percent increase in revenue. In addition to the renovation and development of Wataniya Resort during the current year, the rise in the percentage of reservations reached 100 percent on occasions and holidays during the first half of 2023.

Al-Mukhaizim stressed that NIC is keen to focus and move forward with the comprehensive digital transformation plan within the framework of its strategic vision, and to expand the application of intelligent solutions to make a qualitative leap in innovative investment services and products in a manner that enhances the principle of sustainability, the essence of which lies in promoting and adopting the latest digital technologies in all areas of direct business with customers to meet all their needs and aspirations.

To conclude, Al-Mukhaizim commended the efforts made and the outstanding performance achieved by NIC during the first half of 2023, which reflects the success of the executive management in forming and executing effective strategies based on constructive presence in the market and gaining customer trust on the one hand, in addition to moving forward with innovation, excellence and competition on the other hand.

## China slips into deflation

**BEIJING:** China slipped into deflation for the first time in more than two years in July, official data showed Wednesday, as slowing domestic spending weighs on the post-COVID economic recovery. The reading comes a day after news that the country suffered its biggest fall in exports since the early days of the pandemic, while imports tanked again as domestic and global demand fall away.

The Consumer Price Index, the main gauge of inflation, fell 0.3 in July, the National Bureau of Statistics said, having flatlined in June. While it was marginally better than the 0.4 percent decline forecast in a survey by Bloomberg, it marked the first drop since the beginning of 2021 and will add to pressure on authorities to provide much-needed support to the economy.

Deflation refers to falling prices of goods and services and is caused by a number of factors, including waning consumption. And while cheaper goods may appear beneficial for purchasing power, falling prices pose a threat to the broader economy as consumers tend to postpone purchases in the hopes of further reductions. A lack of demand then forces companies to reduce production, freeze hiring or lay off workers, and agree to new discounts to sell off their stocks — dampening profitability even as costs remain the same.

China experienced a short period of deflation at

the end of 2020 and early 2021, due largely to a collapse in the price of pork, the most widely consumed meat in the country.

Prior to that, the last deflationary period was in 2009. Many analysts fear a longer stretch of deflation this time around, as China's main growth engines stall and youth unemployment is at a record high of more than 20 percent. Ongoing turmoil in real estate, a sector that has long accounted for a quarter of China's economy, is the "main source" for this "deflationary shock", said economist Andrew Batson of Gavekal Dragonomics. Deflation is also being driven by flagging exports — historically a key source of growth for China, he added.

Tuesday's worst-than-expected drop in exports had a direct impact on tens of thousands of export-oriented companies in China, which are now operating at a much slower pace. "The latest Chinese inflationary data did little to inspire confidence that an economic turnaround is forthcoming," Tim Watterer, chief market analyst at KCM Trade, said in a note. "The inflation data... was further evidence that China remains a cause for concern from a global growth perspective," he added.

Meanwhile, the producer price index fell 4.4 percent in July — slightly better than June's 5.4 percent fall but marking the 10th consecutive month of contraction. The index measures the cost of goods leaving factories and gives an overview of the health of the economy. Declining producer prices mean reduced margins for companies. The grim data suggests that China may struggle to achieve a five percent growth target set for the year. — AFP



SHENYANG, China: A woman buys vegetables at a market in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province on August 9, 2023. — AFP



## Business

# Women face barriers despite UK flexible working: Survey

## Survey precedes new government law on flexible working

**LONDON:** Women in the UK are prevented from working in the growing tech and the green sectors because of barriers including low-income backgrounds and not enough flexibility, a survey showed Wednesday. The findings by social enterprise Challenge Works, supported by US bank JP-Morgan Chase, come as the government prepares to introduce a law on flexible working which the report argued could be improved upon.

"As vacancies in future-focused industries such as technology are on the rise and talent is in demand, two-thirds of women from lower-income households with children say that businesses have to change their attitudes towards flexible work," said a report containing results of the survey.

A total 2,000 UK adults were questioned last month, including women described as being in a low-income household and who have children. "Starting the conversation about supporting employees with care duties is just one step in tackling barriers for women from lower-income backgrounds when it comes to future-focused jobs," said Teodora Chis, lead author of the "Pathways to Progress" report.

"Our report identified numerous challenges,

which, beyond care duties, include better funding for training and improved hiring and employee support practices," she added.

UK workers will soon be able to request flexible employment from the first day of a job thanks to a new law. It comes after millions of mainly office workers continue to work from home, at least part of the week, in the wake of the COVID pandemic.

The survey found that 71 percent of employers from future-focused industries believe "there won't be enough people from low-income backgrounds without change". It showed also that almost one third of working women from lower-income backgrounds and with children think they will have to stop employment at some point owing to caring responsibilities. Question by AFP, Chis said the high cost of UK childcare put mothers "in this impossible dilemma to have the time and resources to train, work or take care of their children". Earlier this year, the government announced that most working parents in England would be offered 30 hours of free childcare for their under-fives, to ease cost-of-living pressures on families amid high inflation. — AFP



Protesters hold up placards during the Women's March in London on Jan 21, 2018 as part of a global day of protests. — AFP

## Cathay Pacific rebounds to H1 profit

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific on Wednesday swung to a healthy profit in the first half of the year thanks to a pick-up in travel, with the airline expecting passenger capacity to reach 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels by end of the year. The airline said it made a \$546 million profit in January-June, rebounding from a loss of \$640 million in the same period last year.

It also suffered big losses in the first six months of 2020 and 2021 as the city was battered by coronavirus travel restrictions. Chairman Patrick Healy said Cathay had "worked to rebuild connectivity at the Hong Kong international aviation hub following the full reopening of borders in Hong Kong" and in mainland China.

The airline has been making "good progress" in adding flights and destinations between January and June, which was a "positive period", Healy added in the exchange filing.

"While we are still only part way along our rebuilding journey, our results for the first six months of 2023 demonstrate that we are on the right track," he said.

He added that Cathay would hit its target of "70 percent pre-pandemic passenger flight capacity levels... by the end of 2023". "We are confident of



**HONG KONG:** Cathay Pacific Group Chair Patrick Healy (right) and Cathay Pacific Group Chief Executive Officer Ronald Lam (left) attend a press conference after their interim results were announced in Hong Kong on August 9, 2023. — AFP

reaching 100 percent by the end of 2024."

Cathay carried a total of 7.8 million passengers in the first half of the year, bringing in \$3.2 billion. Total revenue—including cargo and other services—more than doubled year-on-year to \$5.6 billion. But weaker overseas demand meant the cargo unit's revenues dropped 11.6 percent to \$1.4 billion. Hong Kong last year belatedly abandoned its "zero-Covid" policy, which imposed strict rules on travelers and kept the city internationally isolated for two and a half years—tanking the finance hub's economy.

### Recovery 'on track'

The airline has struggled to catch up to regional rivals such as Singapore Airlines, and is racing

to rebuild its capacity amid a manpower crunch. Healy said at a Wednesday press briefing that Cathay was still behind its rivals as it began recovery from an "incredibly low base". "We started later but the trajectory of that recovery, when compared with... the starting point of our key regional competitors, is absolutely on track (and) in some cases faster," Healy said.

Cathay earlier said it would recruit more staff from China and increase the number of Mandarin-speaking flight attendants after allegations of discrimination against mainland Chinese passengers. Chief operations and service delivery officer Alex McGowan said at the Wednesday briefing that the airline was targeting to hire around 200 to 300 cabin crew from mainland China, with recruitment underway.

Cathay also saw the return of around 250 pilots who had left during the pandemic, McGowan said. "We did see an elevated turnover of pilots during a very difficult period of the pandemic... That turnover has now been back at normal levels for some time," he added. The airline also announced it will bolster its fleet by purchasing 32 Airbus A321neo and A320neo aircraft, to be delivered by 2029.

Only around 25 idle Cathay planes remain parked in the Australian desert—a storage method adopted during the pandemic—and all are expected to be returned by the second quarter next year. Cathay also said that before year-end it plans to buy back 50 percent of preference shares it issued to the Hong Kong government in 2020 after receiving a \$5 billion bailout to keep it afloat during the pandemic. The buyback for the remaining shares is set to be completed by July 2024. — AFP

## Stock markets waver after weak China data

**LONDON:** Global stock markets were mixed Wednesday with Wall Street opening flat after European bourses rebounded with a mixed showing by Asia. Data revealed China slipped into deflation, compounding worries about the world's second biggest economy after the United States. "Chinese economics dominates the headlines," noted Steve Clayton, head of equity funds at Hargreaves Lansdown.



"China is now witnessing the actual cost of goods both in stores and at the factory gate falling. It is indicative of a significant slowdown in the Chinese economy, which is beset by high levels of indebtedness." The 0.3-percent drop in China's July consumer prices was the first since the start of 2021 and comes as slowing domestic spending weighs on the country's economic recovery.

Investors were already in a dour mood a day after China announced its biggest drop in exports since the beginning of the COVID pandemic more than three years ago, while imports also tanked owing to slimming demand at home. An extended period of disappointing indicators out of Beijing this year has ramped up pressure on authorities to provide much-needed support to the economy.

However, while leaders have made a number of pledges in recent weeks to introduce stimulus—particularly for the property sector—there have been very few concrete moves save for some small interest rate cuts by the People's Bank of China.

Observers warned that the headline-grabbing bazooka officials have unleashed in the past is unlikely owing to the country's huge debt pile and concerns about an already weak yuan.

### CPI implications

Stocks on Wall Street were flat at the open, as investors await the release of US consumer price inflation later in the week. "On Thursday, the July Consumer Price Index will be released before the start of trading and it, too, will cause a buzz because of the implications it will hold for the Fed's thinking on its next monetary policy step," said Patrick J. O'Hare from Briefing.com

European bank shares recovered one day after sliding when Italy imposed a windfall tax on lenders and owing to concerns over the health of the sector in the United States. Shares in BNP Paribas rose by 1.9 percent in Paris, by 0.9 percent in Commerzbank in Frankfurt and by 1.7 percent in Madrid's Banco Sabadell. "Everything that had fallen on the back of yesterday's announcement from the Italian government of a surprise windfall tax on bank profits, reversed," said Fawad Razaqada, market analyst at City Index and FOREX.com. — AFP

## Dana Gas Q2 profit slides on lower oil prices

**ABU DHABI:** Dana Gas, one of the largest private natural gas companies in the Middle East, has reported a 42 percent drop in its second quarter profit after net revenue fell due to lower oil prices.

Net profit attributable to equity holders of the parent company for the three months to the end of June declined to \$33 million, the company said on Wednesday in a filing to the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, where its shares are traded.

Net revenue for the period fell by about 30 percent annually to \$71 million. Operating costs also

declined during the period. The company's first-half profit dropped 25 percent annually to \$83 million as net revenue slid 20 percent to \$160 million. "Profitability for the first half declined amid a 25 percent drop in the average price of Brent during the first half of 2023 to \$80 per barrel, compared to \$107 per barrel in the first half of 2022," Dana Gas said.

"The decline in profitability was also due to additional discounts on condensate sales in the KRI [Kurdistan Region of Iraq], where the company began to sell to third-party local buyers as other companies shut down production in the KRI."

Oil prices traded lower in the first half, compared with the previous year, amid growing concerns about the slowdown in the global economy as the US Federal Reserve continued to raise interest rates to control inflation. Last year, oil prices rose to close to \$140 a barrel on supply concerns following Russia's military offensive in Ukraine. — Agencies



## WeWork warns it might go out of business

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Embattled office-sharing firm WeWork on Tuesday warned US regulators that it is worried about its survival. Citing financial losses, cash needs, and a drop in memberships, WeWork said in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that "substantial doubt exists about the company's ability to continue as a going concern."

The fate of the New York-based company depends on the "successful execution of management's plan to improve the company's liquidity and profitability," it said in the filing. WeWork's plan for the year ahead includes restructuring, negotiating more

favorable terms on leases, beefing up membership and possibly even issuing debt or selling off assets, the SEC filing said.

WeWork has lost billions of dollars during the first six months of this year, with macroeconomic conditions weakening demand for its shared office spaces, the company told regulators.

WeWork's share price has been below a dollar for months and fell to 16 cents in after-market trading on Tuesday. WeWork has been trying to turn the page on Adam Neumann, its co-founder and former leader whose antics tired investors. The company has been in trouble since Neumann's forced departure in late 2019 following WeWork's failed IPO, in which the company's valuation fell from \$47 billion to less than \$10 billion. WeWork had been a celebrated star in the sharing economy that put a mammoth footprint in the commercial real estate of major cities around the globe. Its collapse led to Neumann's departure and cost the main shareholder, Japanese billionaire Masayoshi Son, billions of dollars. — AFP

## UK economy to skirt recession but growth stutters

**LONDON:** Higher interest rates and increased unemployment will cause the UK economy to experience "stuttering growth" over the next two years, a think tank has said. The economy will avoid a recession — defined by two or more quarters of falling gross domestic product (GDP) in a row — in 2023 but there is still a "60 percent risk" of a recession at the end of 2024, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (Niesr) said in a report.

UK GDP will increase by 0.4 percent in 2023, representing a marginal improvement on its previous forecast in May, the think tank predicted. But Niesr also downgraded predictions of 0.6 percent growth next year down to 0.3 percent after pressure from higher-than-expected borrowing costs.

As a result, the think tank has predicted it will be another year until UK GDP recovers to where it was before the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. It said higher interest rates, which it expects will peak at 5.5 percent, will weigh on growth prospects. "The triple supply shocks of Brexit, COVID and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, together with the monetary tightening that has been necessary to bring inflation down, have badly affected the UK economy," Stephen Millard, deputy director for macroeconomic modeling and forecasting at Niesr, said.

"As a result, we expect stuttering growth over the next two years and GDP to only recover to its 2019 fourth quarter level in the third quarter of 2024. "The need to address the UK's poor growth performance remains the key challenge facing policymakers as we approach the next election." — Agencies

## Australia's lender Commonwealth Bank posts record profit

**SYDNEY:** Australia's biggest lender Commonwealth Bank reported a record annual profit Wednesday as it raked in money from customers forced to pay higher interest rates. After-tax cash profit climbed six percent from a year earlier to Aus\$10.2 billion (US\$6.6 billion) in the 12 months to June 30, the bank said. Commonwealth Bank said the interest it received from borrowers exceeded the returns it paid to savers.

Net interest income rose 18 percent, said the

bank, which is also Australia's biggest mortgage provider. Australia's central bank has been pushing up official interest rates for 15 months to curb inflation.

Commonwealth Bank nevertheless sees the "tailwinds of a recovery" in the economy with a rising population, high commodity prices and low unemployment, said chief executive Matt Comyn. "However, there are signs of downside risks building as rising interest rates have a lagged impact on mortgage customers and other cost of living pressures become a financial strain for more Australians," he said.

The bank was keeping a close eye on the impact on businesses of people tightening non-essential spending, Comyn said. Australia's central bank held the key interest rate at 4.1 percent last week, following a string of rises aimed at taming runaway prices. Annual inflation was 6.0 percent in the June quarter. — AFP

## Business

# Moody's downgrades many US banks as recession risks grow

## Funding risks, weaker profitability and turn in asset quality will test bank credit strength

WASHINGTON: Moody's cut the credit ratings of a host of small and mid-sized US banks and placed several big Wall Street names on negative review. The firm lowered the ratings of 10 banks by one rung, while major lenders Bank of New York Mellon, US Bancorp, State Street, Trust Financial, Cullen/Frost Bankers and Northern Trust are now under review for a potential downgrade.

Moody's also changed its outlook to negative for 11 banks, including Capital One, Citizens Financial and Fifth Third Bancorp. Among the smaller lenders receiving an official ratings downgrade were M&T Bank, Pinnacle Financial, BOK Financial and Webster Financial.

US banks continue to contend with interest rate and asset-liability management (ALM) risks with implications for liquidity and capital, as the wind-down of unconventional monetary policy drains system-wide deposits and higher interest rates depress the value of fixed-rate assets, said Moody's Investors Service in its latest report.

Many US banks' Q2 results showed growing profitability pressures that will reduce their ability to generate internal capital. This comes as a mild US recession is on the horizon for early 2024 and asset quality looks set to decline from solid but unsustainable levels, with particular risks in some banks' commercial real estate (CRE) portfolios.

Combined, these factors underpinned our 7 August rating actions on

27 US banks, the report said.

Rising funding costs and declining income metrics will erode profitability, the first buffer against losses. US banks' Q2 results broadly show a rapid rise in the cost of funding. Although the general drain on deposit funding caused by quantitative tightening (QT) moderated in Q2, there remains a significant risk that systemwide deposits will resume their decline in coming quarters. Most banks' deposits were flat or down only modestly, but the mix worsened, with non-interest-bearing deposits declining and banks paying more for deposits.

The resulting drop in net interest income and net interest margins eroded profitability and, thus, the ability to replenish capital internally. Banks have reduced loan growth to preserve capital, but this will slow the shift of balance sheets toward higher yielding assets, even as funding costs rise and banks deal with a yield curve inversion.

Most regional banks have comparatively low regulatory capital versus the largest US banks and global peers. In the current high-rate environment, this leaves some banks with sizable unrealized economic losses that are not reflected in their regulatory capital ratios vulnerable to a loss of investor confidence. Further, we expect a US recession in early 2024 will worsen banks' asset quality and increase the potential for capital erosion.

A proposed increase in regulatory capital requirements for all banks with

assets above \$100 billion is credit positive, but in the near term will come with increased regulatory costs and may entail business model changes that strain some banks' profitability. Further, regulatory tailoring that sets lower capital and liquidity requirements for banks with less than \$100 billion in assets is credit negative, and weaker regulations can promote excessive risk-taking at some banks.

Asset risk is rising, in particular for small and mid-size banks with large CRE exposures. Asset quality metrics remain solid across most consumer and commercial lending segments, but have begun to deteriorate and have been unsustainably strong compared with historical pre-pandemic levels. Elevated CRE exposures are a key risk given sustained high interest rates, structural declines in office demand due to remote work, and a reduction in the availability of CRE credit.

The Federal Reserve's rapid tightening of monetary policy — which we identified as a key risk to the sector in November 2022 — continues to have a material impact on the US banking system's funding and its economic capital, which informs our credit analysis and the 7 August rating actions on 27 US banks.

"The current environment also reminds us that issues beyond Federal Reserve actions can put upward pressure on interest rates, with negative implications for some US banks. For example, in Q3 2022 challenges in the UK gilt market resulted in higher long-dated US Treas-



sury yields that hurt some US banks' performance. Other non-Fed factors such as heavy Treasury bond issuance and spillovers from monetary policy developments in Japan are also pushing US interest rates higher. The 10-year Treasury yield has risen both Q3 to date and sequentially in Q2 from Q1, even as the yield curve remains inverted, deepening some banks' ALM risk and profitability pressures," the report said.

The 7 August rating actions follow previous actions on 13 March and 21 April in response to US banks' rising interest rate risk and deposit volatility stemming from QT. The growing risks to US banks were also reflected in the change of the US Banking System Outlook to negative in March and the lowering of the Mac-

ro Profile for the US banking system to 'Strong +' from 'Very Strong -' in April, the report added.

US banks' Q2 results broadly show a rise in the cost of a number of banks' funding, even as there has been a pause in the general drain on deposit funding caused by ongoing QT. This pause in pressure on the quantity of deposits was the result of Treasury drawing down its cash balances at the Fed during debt limit negotiations and then rapidly increasing T-bill issuance after the debt limit resolution, both of which supported US banking sector reserve balances at the Fed and, relatedly, deposits. Looking ahead, we expect significant downward pressure to remain on system-wide deposits in coming quarters.



TOKYO: The Sony logo is seen inside the company's headquarters in Tokyo on January 31, 2023. — AFP

## Sony upgrades sales, profit forecasts

TOKYO: Japanese electronics giant Sony on Wednesday upgraded its annual sales and net profit forecasts, driven by strength in its music business and favorable foreign exchange rates. The conglomerate said its annual net profit for the year to March 2024 should reach 860 billion yen (\$6.0 billion), up from a previous estimate of 840 billion yen. Its overall sales forecast was upgraded to 12.2 trillion yen from 11.5 trillion yen.

The company said it expected to see stronger gaming software sales and lower costs for the segment, while healthy foreign exchange moves were seen boosting sales in a wide range of its business fields, including games, music and movies. But falling profitability of PlayStation hardware — partly due to sales promotions — was driving down profits, the company added.

For the financial first quarter, the company said net profit fell 16.7 percent to 217.9 billion yen, as losses in the financial and movie businesses overwhelmed strong gains on the music side. Sales rose 32.9 percent to 2.96 trillion yen in the period.

April-June saw Sony sell 3.3 million PlayStation 5 consoles, up from 2.4 million units during the same period last year. "This is a 38 percent increase, and even though the first quarter figure is slightly below our target, we will probably be able to catch up by the end of the calendar year" so that the company will achieve an annual sales target of 25 million units, chief financial officer Hiroki Totoki told reporters.

The sales increase in gaming software contributed to profits in the sector, the company added. Sony's music segment was seen enjoying both stronger sales and a one-off accounting gain related to a subsidiary, the company said. The movies segment suffered pressure from the ongoing Hollywood strikes, although a strong performance during the first quarter and foreign exchange moves supported the segment overall, it said. Asked about the impact of generative AI platforms on the business, Totoki said "there would be (positive) potentials not only in films but also in development of games".

At the same time, "rights of stakeholders including creators" must be protected, which "is an issue that has to be discussed by the sector as a whole", he said. — AFP

## ABK-Egypt achieves EGP 1.7bn net profit in first half of 2023

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (ABK-Egypt) announced achieving breakthrough results for the first half of the year ended 30 June, 2023 reflecting very solid growth in profits and business volume over the course of the year. The bank managed to achieve EGP 1.7 billion net profit representing a 91.6 percent growth compared to EGP 887 million over the same period in 2022. Also compared to the same period in 2022, Net Interest Income grew by 40 percent to reach EGP 1.8 billion from EGP 1.3 billion and net operating profit increased by 58.7 percent to reach EGP 1.7 billion from EGP 1 billion.

ABK-Egypt, one of the fastest growing banks in the Egyptian market, reported growth in Total Assets by 11.7 percent to reach EGP 84.5 billion compared to EGP 75.6 billion in December 2022.

Total customer deposits increased by 8 percent to reach EGP 71.4 billion compared to EGP 66.2 billion, while the total gross loans portfolio recorded EGP 40.3 billion, reflecting a 13.2 percent increase compared to EGP 35.6 billion at the end of 2022.

### Financial performance

Commenting on the Bank's performance, Ali Marafi, chairman of ABK-Egypt, said, "The outstanding financial results achieved during the first half of 2023 reflect the strength of our financial position. Our achievements since entering the Egyptian market have exceeded the Group's expectations which supports our vision for injecting future investments in Egypt. We remain positive about our future in the country as we continue to witness the considerable measures taken by the Egyptian government and the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) towards achieving economic stability and growth."

The chairman attributed the bank's performance during the initial six months of 2023 to proactive financial management measures aimed at attaining

growth and increasing value. He continued, "We endeavor to continue to improve customer satisfaction through the integration of digital solutions, thereby simplifying and enhancing the bank's product and service offerings."

Reaffirming the strength of the bank's financial results, Khaled El Salawy, CEO & managing director of ABK-Egypt, said, "The bank recorded EGP 2.1 billion profit before tax, a growth rate of 78.2 percent compared to EGP 1.2 billion over the same period last year. This growth reflects the successful implementation of our ambitious strategy and our prudent approach in handling market changes, which allowed us to compete in very challenging local, regional, and global economic conditions and achieve remarkable growth on all financial indicators."

He added, "Our strong momentum during the first half of 2023 reflects the bank's success in seizing business opportunities to achieve sustainable growth. We are fully confident in our ability to maintain notable growth rates for all business lines and increase our market share across all customer segments."

### Expansion

In line with its ambitious growth strategy to expand its business in Egypt and realign its geographical presence to best cater for its growing customer base, ABK-Egypt recently opened a new branch located in Agora Mall, Fifth Settlement, New Cairo. It represents one of 45 premium branches tailored to serve customers in 18 governorates across Egypt.

El Salawy highlighted, "Over the coming period, we will continue to work on expanding our geographical footprint and coverage to more governorates, as well as enhancing customer experience, investing in human capital, and further upgrading our digital infrastructure as part of our digital transformation journey which will contribute to a competitive advantage and attract new customer segments."

Furthermore, Marafi affirmed, "The Bank strives to stay close to customers through increasing nationwide accessibility to all segments as well as providing distinguished banking services and innovative products that meet their rising aspirations and growing needs. The addition of a new branch to our network comes in accordance with our plans to



Ali Marafi

Khaled El Salawy

enhance our reach to grow our business and attract new customer segments, bringing us closer towards achieving the national financial inclusion goals set by the Egyptian government and CBE."

### Financial Inclusion and sustainable development

Both the Chairman as well as the CEO & Managing Director of ABK-Egypt praised CBE's efforts towards achieving the financial inclusion goals through raising financial literacy rates and reaching out to unbanked segments with affordable and simple banking solutions that fulfill their needs. The Bank constantly explores new opportunities as part of its active role in supporting this national direction and all similar endeavors that pave the way to Egypt's transition to a cashless economy, which will ensure economic growth and accelerate the achievement of Egypt's sustainable development goals.

ABK-Egypt strongly believes in the direct impact of sustainable development on economic stability and the positive role of sustainable finance on the long-term growth of the banking sector, which necessitates giving primary focus on funding projects and activities of positive economic, social, and environmental impact. The Bank takes solid steps towards incorporating sustainable finance principles and practices into its business model and works on building a culture that promotes sustainable development and integrates environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into all its operational activities.

## How China is responding to economic challenges

BEIJING: China on Wednesday reported it had entered deflation for the first time since 2021 - the latest indicator pointing to a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy. Here's how Beijing is attempting to reverse the downturn:

### Targeted stimulus

During the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, China unveiled a massive four trillion yuan (\$556 billion at current exchange rates) stimulus plan. The plan sparked an infrastructure boom of roads, airports and high-speed train lines — but also brought the risk of unnecessary projects and growing debt. These days, keen to clean up its finances, Beijing now prefers targeted measures to a massive, costly stimulus plan, according to Larry Hu, economist at Macquarie. In July, the government unveiled measures to encourage the purchase of electric vehicles and household appliances.

### Sluggish consumption

China has in recent weeks announced a series of measures to boost consumption, including large-scale festivals and sporting events, as well as an increase in spending on services

involving catering and healthcare. But this doesn't tackle the root of the problem, according to analysts at Trivium, a China-focused research firm.

"Consumers aren't spending because income growth has slowed and the economic outlook remains uncertain," Trivium analysts wrote in a note. The country's post-COVID recovery is running out of steam, with one in five young people unemployed and households tightening their belts. "Until these two issues are addressed, consumption will not pick up in a meaningful way," the analysts wrote.

### Deflationary spiral

While on paper falling prices may seem like a good thing for purchasing power, a drop into deflation poses a long-term threat. Instead of spending, consumers postpone purchases in the hope of lower prices. And in the absence of demand, companies cut back on production, freeze hiring or lay off staff and agree to further price cuts to clear their inventories, which weighs on profitability as their costs remain the same. In the current economic climate, households will remain "cautious about making purchases of big-ticket items given the



SHENYANG, China: People visit a market in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province on August 9, 2023. — AFP

potential risks of job losses and salary cut", according to Ken Cheung, analyst at Mizuho Bank.

### Property crisis

Bricks and mortar are a pillar of the economy in a country where property has long been seen as a safe bet for middle class Chinese seeking to grow their wealth. Yet financial woes at a large number of developers, many of whom are now struggling to stay afloat, are fuelling a crisis of confidence among potential buyers and

depressing prices. The central bank has extended its support for developers until the end of 2024 and extended loan repayments to enable developers to complete existing projects.

Several cities, including Zhengzhou in central China, have also relaxed purchasing rules to stimulate demand. But the results may fall short of expectations, warns Nomura bank analyst Ting Lu, who pointed to a "weak confidence about the future" and "falling population" as drivers of a decline in housing demand. — AFP



## German drought prompts rethink for ancient palace park trees

This aerial picture shows a general overview of the Sanssouci Palace (Schloss Sanssouci) in Potsdam, southwest of the German capital Berlin.

Climate change is taking a heavy toll on the ancient trees of Sanssouci, the sumptuous summer palace built in the 18th century as the Prussian answer to Versailles. The sprawling grounds with their manicured gardens in Potsdam southwest of Berlin are surrounded by a park filled with soaring, centuries-old giants that are now feeling the bite of persistent droughts. Forest manager Sven Hannemann, standing at the foot of an oak with a six-meter (20-foot) trunk circumference, gazed up at its canopy which once stretched over 500 square meters.

knell. "In 2018 when it was very dry, it suffered a real shock like many woody plants here in the park," Hannemann told AFP. "And since then it's actually been shrinking."

Sanssouci Park stretching across 300 hectares (around 740 acres) has been part of Potsdam's UNESCO World Heritage collection of stately homes and gardens since 1990. Its palace draws more than 300,000 visitors each year.

The park, which counts some 26,000 trees, is now losing between 180 and 300 per year—at least three times the number that died annually before se-

lack of moisture, voracious insects have been feasting on the trees.

### 'Takes decades'

Hannemann knelt at the foot of the dying oak and let sawdust trickle through his hand—the work of capricorn and oak splendor beetles. The insects have nibbled a veritable deluge of debris out of the growth layer between the sapwood and the bark, as evidenced by thumb-thick holes in the trunk. "They eat the cambium and no tree can live without cambium," referring to the cell layer under the bark that is responsible for secondary growth, Hannemann said.

The dying giant trees leave gaping holes in the forest, which harm other trees because their trunks and the forest floor are exposed to the sun's radiation without protection. Hannemann plucked a leaf from a beech shoot and demonstrated the protective reflex of deciduous trees.

"Then the beech leaf curls up—so far, so smart," he said. "What's not so smart about it is that the sun gets through to the thick inner branches which weren't used to it in the first place, and then the branches get a sunburn." It's a vicious circle that Hannemann said impacts all tree species.

Dead oaks or beech trees can then at best only serve as habitats for bats, insects or mushrooms. But if the trunks and branches are too rotten and pose a safety risk to park visitors, they must be felled. Yet there is still hope for the gnarled inhabitants of historic parks such as Sanssouci, whose Rococo palace Prussian King Frederick the Great designed and built as a retreat during his reign from 1740 until 1786.

Gardeners at the historic sites are experimenting with heat-resistant tree species from the Mediterranean region with some promising results, Hannemann said. His team in Potsdam is also relying on the power of evolution. "We believe that native woody plants also adapt to some extent," he said.

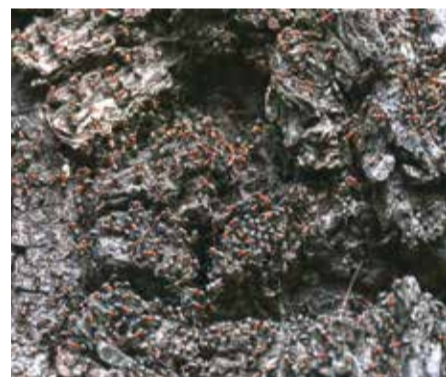
For example, acorns from trees that are obviously less affected by drought get planted in the forest floor. However, the newer, more robust trees will need time to grow the thick protective canopies needed for the ecosystem. "That takes decades," Hannemann said.—AFP



A photo shows a 600-year-old oak tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.



A black beetle is attacked by ants at a 600-year-old oak tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.—AFP photos



A photo shows ants on a 600-year-old oak tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.



Park district manager Sven Hannemann shows leaves of young and newly planted oak plants in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.



A photo shows common fire bugs (Pyrrhoris apterus) on an old tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.



A photo shows paths in the wood paved by beetles on an old tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.

Now its sickly branches are only dotted with green. Hannemann gave the old giant another two years, "then it will be dead". In its 600 years, the tree had withstood storms, frigid temperatures and two world wars, but the lack of rain in the last few years due to the climate crisis has sounded its death

vere weather in 2017-18, a spokesman for the Palaces and Parks of Potsdam and Berlin foundation said. Although 2023 has been less dry than previous years, rainfall has proved insufficient to counteract past drought damage and around half of the trees are showing signs of distress, he said. Beyond the



Graphic content / Park District Manager Sven Hannemann stands next to a 600-year-old oak tree in the parc of Sanssouci suffering from climate change in Potsdam, eastern Germany.



A neon sign of Tai Ping Koon Restaurant sits on the ground after it was removed from a building in Hong Kong.—AFP photos



Construction workers remove a neon sign of Tai Ping Koon Restaurant from a building in Hong Kong.

## Fading neon signs shine again in Hong Kong exhibit

A fuchsia sign for a bridal shop, the Chinese "double happiness" character, a cool-blue flying dragon—luminous lights of dozens of neon signs removed from the streets of Hong Kong flickered on once again at a downtown exhibit. The show at Hong Kong's Tai Kwun—a historic police compound-turned-cultural centre—was curated by Tetra Neon Exchange, a group focused on conserving the city's neon signs that are slowly being taken down due to building safety concerns.

"Neon lights like these are becoming fewer and fewer... so I wanted to come here to take pictures to leave a memory for myself," said 18-year-old student Mei Yan dressed up in a traditional Cheongsam dress—befitting of the exhibit's retro vibe. Another visitor surnamed Chan said the exhibit serves as a reminder of Hong Kong's past. "We saw these signs when we were young, but as time goes by, many of them disappear," Chan told AFP.

Tetra Neon Exchange's general manager said she's hopeful that their conservation work—and the exhibit, which runs until September 3 -- could help boost awareness to preserve the few shimmering signs remaining in the city. "Hopefully that will slow down the disappearing... of neon signs," Cardin Chan said.

But across town in Kowloon Sunday, electrical technicians worked carefully to remove a towering sign for the

famed Tai Ping Koon Restaurant—one of Hong Kong's oldest eating establishments. Its multi-colored billboard was erected in 1964, making it the city's oldest preserved sign on record, said Andrew Chui, the fifth-generation owner of Tai Ping Koon.

"I still remember the day when the sign was put up, my grandfather was here, and I was here, witnessing the history," Chui told AFP. "Today, my son will be here to witness the sign being taken down." He added that the restaurant is seeking government approval for a new, slightly smaller sign to be put up. "Neon signs are a part of Hong Kong culture... I want to keep this tradition as long as possible."—AFP

## Lifestyle

BORN IN NEW YORK'S BRONX BEFORE  
DOMINATING THE GLOBE, HIP HOP TURNS 50

A genre, a culture and a lifestyle all at once: hip hop has traveled from the block party to the billionaire's club, soundtracked protest and celebration, and asserted seismic influence over the course of pop. The reigning music style evolved in rapid, anarchic ways, rocking the industry establishment that long resisted its power, and fully embodying the culture of youth even as the genre grew up.

This year hip hop turns 50, an anniversary that's offered its elders, its fans and the city that birthed it a milestone to reflect on its cultural weight. The exact birthday is difficult to isolate, but the general consensus of musicologists and insiders is that on August 11, 1973 hip hop's rumblings came to a head in New York. It's the stuff of myth: DJ Kool Herc's younger sister Cindy threw a back-to-school party in the rec room of 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, a high-rise apartment building in the Bronx near a major expressway. The artist, born Clive Campbell in Jamaica, spun the same record on two turntables, legend has it, mixing the rhythms into the first documented breakbeat — an essential building block of the genre.



Ralph McDaniels, Hip Hop Coordinator for Queens Public Library speaks during the official launch of the Special Edition Hip-Hop Library Card, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of hip-hop, at the Queens Public Library.

"It was just a birthday party, it was just a moment, you know," Ralph McDaniels, a hip hop historian and pioneering TV host, told AFP. "But that party is the beginning and the spark that set off all of this for all the other DJs." The DJ offered fodder for the b-boys and b-girls — the parties who developed breakdancing. And then of course there's the emcee: the master

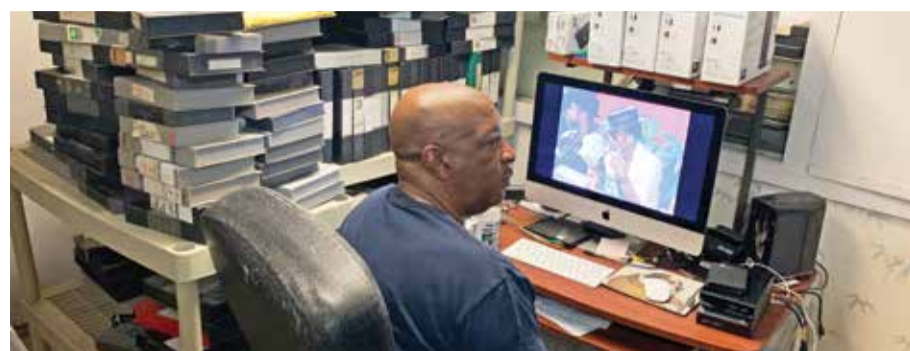
of ceremonies who rapped spoken word to the beat.

## 'Mental vacation'

These types of house parties took place in a Bronx suffering some of the worst effects of nationwide economic turmoil that was particularly acute in New York. Discriminatory housing and highway development caused mass displacement, economic decline and entrenched poverty in the borough.

Landlords burned buildings for insurance money rather than maintain them, as the city justified limiting public resources as it grappled with fiscal crisis. The block parties and jam sessions were a lifeline for teens and families living in this bleak reality. "I was a kid when it first started, and I saw how it brought the community together," Jerry Gibbs, who grew up in the Bronx, told AFP.

"It was a special treat for us, having jams in the park. You'd see the DJs come out and how they hooked up the equipment and how they were creative with their music... They made people dance," the 55-year-old, who now goes by the moniker DJ Cool Gee, continued.



Historian, pioneering hip hop documentarian and historian Ralph McDaniels sits at his desk as he shows his archives of footage spanning 40 years in Elmont, New York.

"They made people forget about all their problems, all their issues, all their worries — for one night they was able to be on like a mental vacation." What's now referred to as old-school hip hop began developing in the late 1970s into the early 1980s, as the music went from the block to the nightclub.

The classic DJ-MC live performance eventually saw the rap — the easiest element to isolate and package — go commercial and find resounding success. But even as it flourished, hip hop's stories remained rooted in experiences of injustice and inequality.

"Hip hop's greatest artists came out of tough times," McDaniels said. "The greatest artists like Jay, Biggie, Nas, I've been to where they grew up at." "These are not great places, but they found love in that place," he continued. "And they knew and understood the people, and the families and the people and the smells and everything that goes along. And they took all of that color and stuff and put it in their records." — AFP



US rapper Jay-Z arrives for the Los Angeles Special Screening of Netflix's "The Harder They Fall" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, California. - AFP photos



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



US rapper Nicki Minaj arrives for the world premiere of "Barbie" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, California.

PIONEERING DOCUMENTARIAN  
PROTECTS HIP HOP'S MEMORY BOX

In the basement of a suburban home on Long Island lives thousands of tapes of footage documenting the origins of hip hop, the dominant music genre of our time. Brooklyn native Ralph McDaniels was among the first figures to film the rap scene in New York, the city that gave birth to the genre, documenting its evolution on his show "Video Music Box," where soon-to-be legends including Nas and Jay-Z made their early appearances.

"We were on this low-power TV station that everybody had, there was only 10 of them," McDaniels said of his show's early days in New York. "We were the last one — channel 31... Kids got out (of school) at 3:00pm, they ran home and sat down and watched whatever the latest thing was — whatever was new, I played it." "Diddy, Jay-Z, all these guys would come to me and be like, can you get it on today?"

McDaniels also directed hundreds of music videos, including "C.R.E.A.M." from the Wu-Tang Clan and "It Ain't Hard to Tell" from Nas. "The music video became super important for hip hop artists because very often, we didn't get radio airplay, especially in the '80s," McDaniels told AFP. "It was late night mix shows, you only heard it there."

"When I came on in '83, people saw LL Cool J" speak on-camera for the first time, he explained — Video Music Box was the first to air an interview with the rapper, who was one of the earliest to achieve commercial success. "MTV wasn't playing any Black artist at that particular time, other than like, Michael Jackson," he said. "Michael Jackson was cool, but he ain't the hood. He's not who represents everybody."

"But Run-DMC and LL Cool J, this is what New York looked like." In his basement studio McDaniels scrolls through footage of LL as well as DJ Grandmaster Flash, donning dark shades and a glittering, disco-esque outfit in 1985. "We had Ralph McDaniels, that's the only thing we had," Jay-Z summed up in the Nas-produced documentary "You're Watching Video Music Box," which came out on Showtime in 2021.



US singer Lauryn Hill performs during the Mawazine Music Festival.

## 'Tells the culture'

McDaniels' also has some of the earliest footage of Missy Elliott, as well as Mary J. Blige, filmed at the moment when so many teen girls wanted to be just like her. His dream? "Forty years from now, 100 years from now, this stuff will be in some archives somewhere that somebody can go in and look at and say, 'Tell me about Mary J. Blige,' McDaniels said. "And you'll be able to go in and look at Mary J. Blige in her time — and it was archived by the people that were there." Today McDaniels' official title is Hip Hop Coordinator at the Queens Public Library, and the microphone box he used on his show is in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

He's also been working since 2017 to digitize some 20,000 hours of footage contained in his mammoth personal archive. "We have to treat it like it's important," he said of the images. "It is important, because this is what is telling the story of our culture, and you can't just throw it away."

He noted that a lot of soul music archives, for example, have been sacrificed to time: "As a teenager when I first got into the business, I realized that a lot of these things were lost. And I said, 'That can't happen to our stuff,' at least the stuff that I shoot." He's been a regular on 2023's event circuit that's celebrating half-a-century of hip hop throughout the city.

McDaniels laughs that by the time hip-hop's 51st birthday rolls around, "corporate will go away," but that it's



Young Thug performs during the Astroworld Festival at NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas.



US rapper Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr, aka Snoop Dogg, performs on stage at the Bercy Accor Arena, in Paris.

still important to mark the genre's milestone anniversary and acknowledge the mammoth influence it's had. "To be celebrating 50 years is amazing, because there was no value on this when we first started," he said.

"Nobody was interested in hiring a hip hop DJ, or getting an emcee to get on the mic, or getting some breakdancers to come out and perform on a stage or using graffiti on a library card like we did today," he added, referring to a special commemorative design that recently debuted on library cards in the New York borough of Queens. "We're going to make sure that this is available to everybody," he said of his footage. "And it will play its role in libraries, museums, and archives around the world." "This tells the culture." — AFP



US rapper Missy Elliott performs onstage during the 65th Annual Grammy Awards at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California.



US rapper Eminem performs during a concert at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, near Paris.

From East to West to  
southern trap, 50 years of hip hop

From the disco samples of old school hip hop to the deadpan delivery of today's drill, American hip hop has morphed in every direction over its 50-year history, defying categorization. Still, patterns have emerged: what follows is a run-down of some of hip hop's prominent phases.

## Old school

What's now broadly referred to as old school hip hop is the genre's earliest commercially recorded music, and typically refers to songs put out from approximately 1979 to 1983. The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" became the first commercially successful hip hop song after it was released on September 16, 1979. It's preserved in the Library of Congress' National Recording Registry.

"The Message" from Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, released in 1982, brought a socially conscious element to the genre, delivering a raw portrait of urban life and the stresses of poverty. Other prominent artists of the moment included Afrika Bambaataa, DJ Kool Herc, Melle Mel and Grandmaster Caz.

## East Coast

New York and the East coast were pivotal to the development of hip hop throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the "golden age." Run-DMC was among the most influential acts of the era, achieving a smattering of notable firsts for the genre.

They, the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy offered harder renditions of hip hop than their disco-tinged predecessors, with the latter rising to prominence for their political themes including racism and Black power. More complex wordplay with swift delivery and elaborate metaphors were emblematic of the age, with acts including Eric B. & Rakim, LL Cool J, Nas, Big Daddy Kane and The Notorious B.I.G. gaining wide acclaim.

De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest were meanwhile pioneering "alternative hip hop," bringing in jazz and R&B elements. Salt-N-Pepa, Foxy Brown and Lauryn Hill broke barriers for women, with Hill in particular popularizing melodic rapping.

The Notorious B.I.G. — or "Biggie" — with the backing of Puff Daddy's "Bad Boy Records" became the East Coast's king following the release of his landmark debut album "Ready to Die" in 1994, up until his shock murder in 1997. And the Wu-Tang Clan also popularized East Coast styles emphasizing hard edges and strong beats.

## West Coast

The sounds emerging from California were fast and influenced by electronica, centering more on DJs than raps. Ice-T pioneered West Coast and gangsta rap in the late 1980s, while N.W.A went platinum with its album "Straight Outta Compton" in 1988. Dogged by controversy and censorship over profane lyrics — which many alleged were misogynist while also glorifying drug use and crime — N.W.A. made waves for laying bare experiences of endemic racism and excessive policing.

The group's dissolution saw members including Dr. Dre and Ice Cube gain solo acclaim. And Tupac Shakur also proffered messages of injustice as he became among the greatest

rappers of all time prior to his 1996 murder, which came just months before Biggie's. Dr Dre's "The Chronic" charted new paths for rap as a seminal record of the era.

It also introduced one of his most famous proteges, the then-budding rapper today known as Snoop Dogg, whose laid-back, windows-down lyrical delivery came to epitomize G-Funk, and whose debut album "Doggystyle" was a Dre production. Dre also shaped another household name: Eminem. "He's a creator who has moved popular culture three times... with gangsta rap, G-funk and Eminem," said industry magnate Jimmy Iovine of Dre.

## Bling and Prog

Biggie's commercial fame paved the way for other East Coast stars, including Jay-Z, DMX, Busta Rhymes and 50 Cent, with the turn-of-the-millennium bling era. Jay-Z's "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" was a major hit years before he would become one of hip hop's billionaires and an industry magnate. His work also brought producers including Kanye West to the fore.

In his early career, West gained near-universal acclaim, not least for his integration of house, electronica and soul into creatively risky productions. And Nicki Minaj was praised for her chameleon talents and blistering flow, while Drake brought in R&B sensibilities and churned out hit after hit. Kendrick Lamar became one of contemporary music's most impactful writers, with his verses offering insight both personal and systemic, all set to jazz-heavy instrumentals.

Lamar along with West and Common all became torch-bearers of the broadly defined progressive rap, defined by a focus on social ills and change. Hip hop was also burgeoning across the South, with artists including 2 Live Crew, Missy Elliott and Outkast gaining traction.

## Trap and Drill

Into the 2010s rap's nexus shifted to Atlanta, home to the trap subgenre characterized by cymbal patterns and synthesized drums. Trap remains among American music's most popular styles, with its influence crossing into pop and EDM as well as Latin America's wildly popular reggaeton. Much of its lyricism focused on life in "the trap" — a reference to drug-dealing spots. Artists including Outkast, T.I., Gucci Mane and Lil Wayne expanded its popularity, while the idiosyncratic Young Thug became one of contemporary hip hop's most emulated artists.

Today's trap-influenced superstars including Migos, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion. Internet virality has been key to several contemporary movements including "Soundcloud rap," whose angsty, jagged sound injected vulnerability into hip hop. And the equally dark drill has brought the aggressive lyricism of gangsta back to prominence. It began percolating in Chicago before traveling to Britain and resurfacing in New York. Brooklyn drill gained mainstream clout thanks to work from artists including the late Pop Smoke and Fivio Foreign, as today's stars like the Bronx's Ice Spice take it viral. — AFP

Lifestyle



An aerial view shows the construction site of the Royal Caribbean's new ship 'Icon of the Seas' at the Turku shipyard in Finland's southwest coast.



A general view shows the construction site of the Royal Caribbean's new ship 'Icon of the Seas' at the Turku shipyard in Finland's southwest coast.



Workers walk at the construction site on a deck of the Royal Caribbean's new ship.

With cruise bookings seeing a resurgence after the COVID pandemic caused luxury liners to mothball, a Finnish shipyard is putting the final touches on what will be the world's largest cruise ship. Royal Caribbean's luxurious new vessel Icon of the Seas is nearing completion in the Turku shipyard on Finland's southwest coast, its maiden voyage scheduled for January 2024. "This ship is as of today, as far as we are aware of, the biggest cruise ship in the world," said Tim Meyer, CEO of shipbuilder Meyer Turku tasked with the construction.



A photo shows an interior view of the construction site inside the Royal Caribbean's new ship 'Icon of the Seas' at the Turku shipyard in Finland's southwest coast.



surpass pre-pandemic levels with 31.5 million passengers in 2023. "After the restrictions are gone and the situation has eased up, we are seeing that the market is coming back very strong," Meyer said.

**Bigger is better?**

With a gross tonnage of 250,800 -- five times the size of the Titanic--Icon of the Seas will snatch the title of the world's largest cruise ship from Royal Caribbean's current flagship, Wonder of the Seas. Meyer Turku also has two more similar sized Icon-class vessels in their order books. "We have seen over the last decade that cruise ships have become bigger," said Alexis Papatheanassis, professor of Cruise Management at Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences.

Papatheanassis noted that "there are obvious economic benefits" to me-

ga-sized ships, reducing the cost of individual passengers. With its seven pools, a park, waterslides, shopping promenades, ice skating rink and "more venues than any other ship", larger vessels like the Icon of the Seas also offer more options for spending money on board.

This "in turn enables cruise companies to be more profitable," he added. The extra income is welcomed by the cruise lines--in order to survive Covid lockdowns the cruise lines "had to take a lot of credit" they now have to pay back. "It's going to be a challenging time with financial austerity for cruise companies," Papatheanassis said, adding that he expected ticket prices to rise.

**What is too big?**

While "the tendency towards increasing the size of the ship is not go-

ing to stop", Papatheanassis believes "it will certainly be slowed down". The reason behind this is not engineering but rather the financial equation. "The bigger the ships are, the higher the investment cost and the required technology know-how. And technological know-how does not come cheap," Papatheanassis explained. Similarly, larger vessels come with their own unique challenges, such as port overcrowding, he noted.

As passenger numbers have grown, popular cruise destinations like the modest Arctic town of Longyearbyen in Norway's Svalbard archipelago, for example, have voiced concern over the lack of infrastructure to accommodate such large crowds. Moreover, as cruise companies aim to increase passenger capacity, they also reduce the ratio of crew to passengers, which can pose challenges in case of unexpected

events. "Regarding accidents or crises onboard, with larger ships it's a much greater challenge to take care of the evacuation," Papatheanassis explained.

**Climate impact**

From a climate perspective, some argue that one large ship is more energy efficient than several small ones. But others disagree. "If we followed that logic, we would be building bigger cruise ships, but less of them," argued Constance Dijkstra, Shipping Campaigner at the NGO Transport & Environment (T&E).



The logo of the Meyer Turku shipyard is seen at the construction site of the Royal Caribbean's new ship 'Icon of the Seas' at Finland's southwest coast.

"But that's not what's happening. We are witnessing more and more vessels that are bigger than ever." And while modern ships are taking steps to mitigate emissions with technology--the Icon of the Seas will run on liquefied natural gas (LNG) -- environmentalists are not convinced. Often hailed as a bridge towards more climate-neutral options, LNG has lower emissions than traditional marine fuels, but T&E has voiced concern over potential methane leaks.

"LNG does have dramatic consequences for the climate because it leaks methane," Dijkstra said. A typical component of LNG, methane is a powerful greenhouse gas that can have a much worse impact on the climate than carbon dioxide. "The problem is when you use LNG as a marine fuel, you are encouraging the development of the gas industry."--AFP

**Tory Lanez sentenced to 10 years for shooting Megan Thee Stallion**

Canadian rapper Tory Lanez, convicted of shooting US artist Megan Thee Stallion in the feet during a drunken argument after a Hollywood party, was sentenced Tuesday to 10 years in prison. A Los Angeles judge handed down the sentence after hearing how Lanez had ordered the hip-hop star to "Dance, b\*\*\*h" as he shot at her several times while she stood on the road.



Tory Lanez (right) and Megan Thee Stallion.

The sentencing follows Lanez's conviction in December for assault with a semiautomatic firearm, discharging a firearm with gross negligence, and carrying a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle. Prosecutors had requested a 13-year sentence, claiming Lanez had caused physical and emotional scarring to the "WAP" performer. Lanez's attorneys had asked for him to be given probation or three years in prison, and mandatory rehab, including for alcohol addiction.

In a protracted sentencing hearing that began Monday, Judge David Herriford said he had received more than 70 letters on Lanez's behalf, including from his celebrity friends. One was from musician Iggy Azalea,

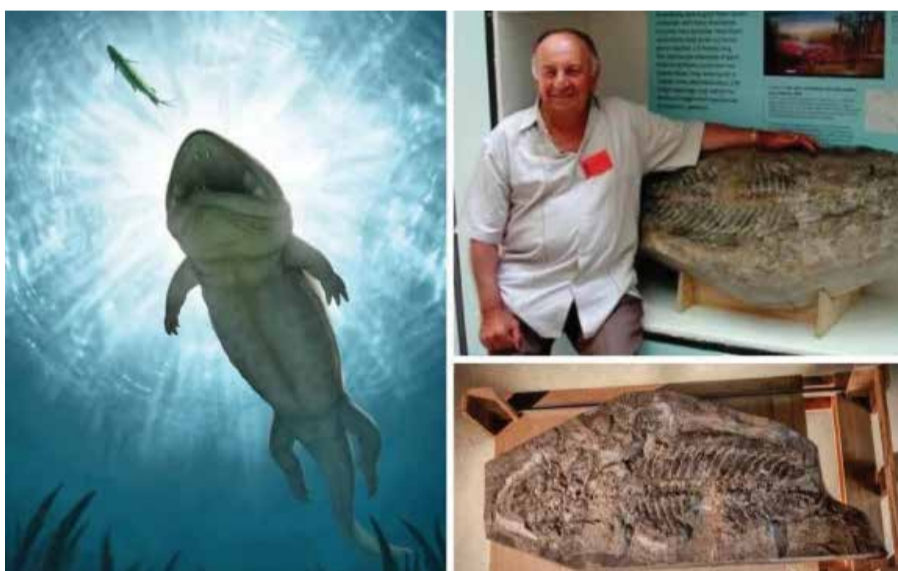
whom he said had requested a sentence that was "transformational, not life-destroying."

Another came from Lanez's young son. But the judge ordered Lanez--who has been in jail since his conviction--to serve a decade behind bars. He said the prosecution had proven two aggravating factors, involving the use of weapon and a particularly vulnerable victim, but had not proven that the crime involved a high degree of cruelty, viciousness or callousness.

Megan Thee Stallion--whose real name is Megan Pete--had been in a car with Lanez, his bodyguard and her friend Kelsey Harris after a party at Kylie Jenner's luxury home in July 2020. She and Lanez--whose real name is Daystar Peterson--had developed an intimate relationship in the months before the incident.

Harris, who only learned of the sexual relationship that night, had a "crush" on Lanez, she told the court, and an argument then erupted in the car, with Megan Thee Stallion demanding to be let out of the vehicle. The "Savage" rapper said she saw Lanez pointing a gun at her and opening fire "after he said, 'Dance, b\*\*\*h.'"

Megan Thee Stallion told the court during the trial she felt she had "been turned into some kind of villain," in the wake of the shooting, with the male-dominated rap world frequently seeming to be against her. In a statement read in court Monday, she said she had not experienced "a single day of peace" since she was shot in July 2020. "He not only shot me. He made a mockery of my trauma," she said.--AFP



**Scientists solve Australian chicken farmer's fossil mystery**

A mystery fossil accidentally unearthed by an Australian chicken farmer in the 1990s has finally been identified as a stout amphibian with tusks and "gnarly teeth", scientists said Wednesday. The 240 million-year-old fossil was discovered by Mihail Mihailidis as he washed down a massive sandstone slab that was originally destined to become a retaining wall for his garden.

Donated to the Australian Museum in 1997, the near-pristine specimen has puzzled scientists who have labored for almost 30 years to figure out what kind of beast it belonged to. University of New South Wales paleontologist Lachlan Hart said it had now been identified as a "heavyset" amphibian measuring 1.2 meters (nearly four feet) from snout to tail--resembling a cross between a crocodile and a giant salamander.

He said it likely preyed on freshwater fish, using its "pretty gnarly teeth" and "a pair of fang-like tusks on the roof of its mouth". "We don't often find skeletons with the head and body still attached, and the soft tissue preservation is an even rarer occurrence," Hart said. The crea-

ture has been given the scientific name of "Arenarpeton supinatus", which researchers said roughly translated to "supine sand creeper".

It comes from an extinct group of animals known as the "temnospondyls", Hart said, which roamed the planet before the dinosaurs. Researchers X-rayed the bulky fossil with the help of Australia's border force, which let them run it through a giant scanner more commonly used to search cargo for contraband. It was found in the mid 1990s near the seaside town of Umina Beach, about one hour's drive north of Sydney in the state of New South Wales.

A blaze of international publicity followed, with Time Magazine suggesting at the time it could "amplify the story of human evolution". "This is one of the most important fossils found in New South Wales in the past 30 years, so it is exciting to formally describe it," Australian Museum paleontologist Matthew McCurry said. "It represents a key part of Australia's fossil heritage."--AFP

**Winning \$1.58 billion Mega Millions jackpot ticket sold in Florida**

A lottery player in the US state of Florida won a record \$1.58 billion Mega Millions jackpot on Tuesday, the lottery announced. "After 31 drawings without a big win, a lucky ticket-holder in Florida will celebrate the summer of 2023 with a record-sized MEGA jackpot, currently estimated at \$1.58 billion," Mega Millions said in a statement. Tuesday's 10-figure jackpot win is expected to set a new record for the game, trumping the previous Mega Millions' top payout of \$1.537 billion won in 2018, the lottery said.

The Mega Millions jackpot winner is the first declared since April--and if the prize sum is confirmed, it would be the third-largest payout in US lottery history, ABC News reported. The winner, who has not been identified, can choose to take about \$783 million in cash up front, or receive the full sum, broken into yearly payments over 30 years, which increase by five percent annually.

Most winners choose the lump sum payout. All winnings are subject to income taxes. The odds of winning the Mega Millions jackpot are one in 303 million--much higher than the one-in-a-million chance of being struck by lightning, according to US government data. The winning numbers on Tuesday were 13, 19, 20, 32 and 33, plus the gold ball 14.--AFP



## Sports

# N Korea invites foreigners to Pyongyang golf tournament

## Another tentative step in the reclusive country's reopening

SEOUL: North Korea has invited foreign golfers to a tournament in Pyongyang, another tentative step in the reclusive country's reopening after Chinese and Russian officials attended a military parade last month. The country has been under a rigid self-imposed COVID-19 blockade since early 2020 but there are increasing signs Pyongyang may be becoming more flexible on border controls, experts say. "The Pyongyang Golf Course hosts an amateur golfers competition in spring and autumn every year," read a post from August 2 on Pyongyang's official DPR Korea Tour website.

"Foreign amateurs can also take part in this competition held in spring and autumn in our country and develop friendship with Korean amateur golfers." The post also included an email address and phone number for its "golf travel company" - under Pyongyang's official tourism administration - but did not say when the tournament would take place. In a separate post, Pyongyang said its agency, the Ryo-myong Golf Travel Company, had developed attractions including "an underwater golf course, archery ground and boating ground".

The posts were shared after Beijing confirmed in July that North Korea had registered for this year's Asian Games, to be held in the Chinese city of Hangzhou in September. North Korea had registered for an overseas sporting event earlier this year but failed to send athletes. Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute told AFP recent signs indicate "that Chinese tourism to North Korea will gradually resume in the future".

### Missiles par for course?

The North's state media has said Kim Jong Il - current leader Kim Jong Un's father and predecessor - scored an incredible 11 holes-in-one the first time he



NAMPHO: A contestant putts the ball during an autumn golf contest at the Pyongyang Golf Course in Nampho City. - AFP

ever played golf. Pyongyang's golf course was reportedly built in the early 1980s and was officially opened in 1987 to celebrate the 75th birthday of the country's founder, Kim Il Sung. It was financed by pro-Pyongyang ethnic Koreans in Japan.

Today, the course "covers an area of 196 hectares and has... 18 holes in total. More than 200 people can play there," the DPR Korea Tour website says. An Chan-il, a defector turned researcher who runs the

World Institute for North Korea Studies, said Pyongyang has "established a department of golf" at a key sports university in Pyongyang. "North Korea has designated golf as an important means of earning foreign currency," An told AFP. However, according to South Korea's Chosun Ilbo newspaper, there are signs that the North has also started using the course for its banned missile tests.

Pyongyang's March 9 launches of multiple short-

range ballistic missiles were likely fired from Thaeson lake at the golf course to make it difficult for Seoul to "pinpoint the launch origin", according to a military expert cited by the paper. In 2005, during a period of better ties, the golf course hosted a Korean Ladies' Professional Golf Association event. The winner, South Korea's Song Bo-bae, told media at the time: "The greens were much slower than the ones in South Korea, which made it quite challenging." — AFP

## Wozniacki wins WTA return match after layoff since 2020

MONTREAL: Former world number one Caroline Wozniacki made a triumphant comeback in her return to competition after a layoff of more than three years at the WTA Montreal Open on Tuesday. The 33-year-old Danish star defeated 115th-ranked Australian qualifier Kimberly Birrell 6-2, 6-2 in her comeback match at the hardcourt event, a tune-up for the US Open, which starts on August 28 in New York.

"I'm happy," Wozniacki said. "A little tired. Just it was fun to be out there again playing on center court in front of a big crowd. I'm just thrilled that I could win my first match in 3 1/2 years." Her second-round opponent will be reigning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova, the Czech world number 10 who ousted Egypt's 33rd-ranked Mayar Sherif 6-4, 6-2.

Wozniacki, the 2018 Australian Open champion, retired after a third-round loss at the 2020 Australian Open. She gave birth to two children and became a television commentator, her WTA playing days seemingly complete. But Wozniacki announced in June she was making a comeback and received wildcard entries into Montreal and next week's Cincinnati tournament as stepping-stones to the US Open, where she was runner-up in 2009 and 2014.

Before her retirement, Wozniacki won 30 titles and 635 career matches. She spent 71 weeks atop the rankings. Now she has her first match victory as a mother, having given birth to son James and daughter Olivia in the 1,293 days since being ousted by Ons

Jabeur at Melbourne in 2020. "That's pretty crazy," she said. "I was just looking at the clock actually. My kids are napping right now which is awesome. So I'm going to catch them after I do a little bit of treatment and food and stuff."

"That's the good part of playing early. I still have the afternoon with them." Wozniacki dropped the opening game but rallied to capture the final four games of the opening set, the last on a Birrell double fault after 43 minutes. "I was definitely a little rusty," Wozniacki said. Wozniacki broke for a 4-2 edge in the second set, held for a 5-2 lead and broke again on a backhand winner to secure the victory after 97 minutes, raising her arms skyward with a smile of delight at her achievement.

### 'Excited to be back'

"I'm just excited to be back and competing, and I think for me it's so special having my family here," Wozniacki said. "As a 33-year-old that has played on tour for many years, and doing it with my kids that now, especially the older one is starting to really understand and gets to really experience the world and different countries, I think it's so cool." Lifting her comeback from practice courts to matches was a major step for Wozniacki.

"I didn't really know what to expect," Wozniacki said. "You have all these things in your head that this is how you're supposed to be playing and you're supposed to be doing this and that, but to be honest, I had no idea what I was going to come up with when I was out on court because I just haven't played a real match in so long. "It was all about not getting down on myself if I made a mistake and not get too excited when I hit a good shot. So it was just kind of evening out those emotions. I think everything taken into consideration, I'm very happy with how I played today and how I got through." — AFP



MONTREAL: Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark reacts after winning a point against Kimberly Birrell of Australia on Day 2 during the National Bank Open on August 8, 2023. - AFP

## Rahm leads the way as PGA Tour playoffs begin at Memphis

WASHINGTON: Reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm, the season points leader, will be the player to catch when the PGA Tour FedEx Cup playoffs begin Thursday at the St. Jude Championship. The top 70 players from the season will tee off at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee, hoping to be among 50 who advance to next week's BMW Championship, from which the top 30 will reach the Tour Championship in two weeks at East Lake in Atlanta.

Rahm has never won the playoff top prize, which this year is \$18 million from a prize money pool of \$75 million. If he can keep the points lead through

the next two events, Rahm will get a two-stroke edge to start the Tour Championship over the number two points holder, who at this point is American Scottie Scheffler, just ahead of three-time playoff winner and defending champion Rory McIlroy. "You want to win every time we tee it up, but yeah, the goal is to try to get to East Lake as number one and enjoy that two-shot lead," Rahm said Tuesday.

Rahm knows how much the extra strokes can matter. In 2021, he lost the Tour Championship by a stroke to Patrick Cantlay even though he played the four rounds in three fewer shots than the American. "It has always made a difference," Rahm said. "It made a difference when I finished second place. It's the reason why they give it to you, so if we can take advantage of it, it would be nice." Top-ranked Scheffler, second-ranked McIlroy and world number three Rahm will play together in the first two rounds.

Rahm has enjoyed an epic year with four titles, taking the Tournament of Champions and American

## Boutier 'realistic' over British Open success

LONDON: Celine Boutier admits it is a long shot but the French player still starts as favorite to make it three wins in a row at the final major of the season, this weekend's Women's British Open at Walton Heath. The 29-year-old claimed her first major on home soil at the Evian Championship two weeks ago and followed up with a win in the Scottish Open. "I know the odds, even to win two in a row are very rare," she pointed out. "It would be unbelievable to win again this week."

"But I'm feeling good, a little bit tired physically but I'll just try and focus on putting a few good rounds together and try and give myself a chance on Sunday. "I am happy to have won my first major and winning at Evian in front of my family and the French fans was something I had always dreamed of doing, so anything else is a bonus." South African Ashleigh Buhai defends the title she won at Muirfield in Scotland a year ago. "It's fantastic to be back after a whirlwind year, so many memories," she said.

"Winning a major has given me so much confidence. It gave me the belief that I can win when I am playing well. "But I'm trying not to put too much pressure on myself. It's very hard to defend a title," she added. Last year at Muirfield, Rose Zhang was the top amateur. Twelve months on and the 20-year-old American in one of the title favorites. Having swept the boards at amateur level, Zhang exceeded expectations by winning on her first outing as a professional on the LPGA Tour at the Mizuho Americas Tournament in June.

Since then, she has had top ten finishes in three majors. "It's crazy," she admitted. "Last year, I was just trying to understand what it was like to play in the British Open as an amateur and now I'm a professional. "Walton Heath is a little bit wet and there is a lot of heather. The heather is beautiful, but it's terrible. Not somewhere you want to be." Zhang is playing with Buhai and Brooke Henderson in the first two rounds, and she admitted: "It's so cool. I actually played with Ashleigh in my first US Open back in 2018."

Ko Jin-young, the world No.2, has had a patchy season. She has won twice - in March and May - but has struggled in recent weeks and, after Evian, she spent a week back home in Korea, but withdrew from a tournament. "I have an injury in my neck," she said. "I had a 20 hour flight from Evian and I couldn't sleep. I had a headache and felt dizzy before the second round so I couldn't play. Ko has also struggle with a wrist injury. "I don't have much expectation this week, but I like to be here in England, near London," she said. "But I haven't set any goals." — AFP

Express titles in January, the Genesis at Riviera in February and his second major title in April at Augusta National. He also shared second last month at the British Open. "It has been a really good season," Rahm said. "Accomplished a lot of things I set myself out to do this year, and one of them was to be sitting right here as number one. "Really proud of what I've done so far. I'm looking forward to keeping it going in the playoffs."

Rahm expressed his support for PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan, who faced a players meeting at Memphis set for criticism about his handling of a merger deal with the Saudi backers of the rival LIV Golf League after a year of trying to keep PGA players from defecting to the upstart circuit. "He should have the opportunity right now to finish this off the way he did," Rahm said. "I think we're quickly forgetting how well he managed a lot of things. He did an amazing job in COVID and kept a lot of people employed. We were the first major sport to come back." — AFP



TORONTO: Andy Murray of Great Britain serves against Lorenzo Sonego of Italy during Day Two of the National Bank Open, part of the Hologic ATP Tour, at Sobey's Stadium on August 8, 2023. - AFP

## Murray, Zverev power through; Ruud wins

TORONTO: Former Toronto Masters winners Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev dispatched first-round opponents in windy conditions on Tuesday to power into the second round of the Canadian hardcourt event. Britain's Murray worked through a marathon opening set before dominating the second for a 7-6 (7/3), 6-0 victory over Italy's Lorenzo Sonego. The 36-year-old Scotsman, with three Canadian titles on his resume, earned his first victory in the country since his 2015 trophy as he defeated the Italian in two hours, eight minutes in a challenging wind.

Germany's Zverev, who defeated Roger Federer for the 2017 Canadian title, reached the second round by defeating Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor 6-4, 7-6 (7/3). Third seed Casper Ruud began his US Open run-up after a bye, struggling at the start but wrapping up a 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 defeat of Jiri Lehecka for a 199th career ATP match win. The Norwegian trailed 4-0 in the first-set tiebreaker but found form in his first hardcourt match of the summer to reach the third round.

"I told myself not to give up, just keep holding onto the score," he said. "I saved a couple of set points. "It was all about luck and margins and they were on my side. By the end of the second set I was hitting and serving better - I'm happy how I progressed in the match." Murray won his only previous encounter with Sonego last February in Doha, saving three match points. Murray, ranked 40th to his opponent's 39th, also lifted the trophy here in 2009 and 2010. Murray's opening set lasted 90 minutes, with the two-time Wimbledon winner saving set points in the 10th game.

He profited from Sonego's 44 unforced errors to sweep into the second round. "I'm really pleased to have won. Those were blustery conditions," Murray said. "The wind was changing conditions during the points. "We knew it would be like this after hitting here this morning. The breeze added a bit of stress." Murray said getting through the first set was a challenge. "It was tight, there were a lot of opportunities on both sides," he said. "I managed to sneak through the tiebreaker, he probably got disappointed and I relaxed a bit in the second set. "I hope to build confidence and win a few matches," said the three-time Grand Slam champion, who exited last week in the Washington third round to Taylor Fritz. "I had success here but it was a long time ago. Hopefully I can build some momentum." Former ATP number two Zverev, seeded 13th and playing here for the first time in four years, extended his current win streak to six matches after taking his home event in Hamburg last month. The German battled the wind for an hour and three-quarters to prevail. He sent down an ace for three match points and won as his opponent missed on a drop shot attempt. — AFP

## Sports

## Colombia 'dream big', plot England downfall at WCup

## Coach to 'make history' as the last team standing

MELBOURNE: Colombia captain Catalina Usme is "dreaming big" and coach Nelson Abadia wants to "make history" as the last team standing from the Americas plots the downfall of England in the Women's World Cup quarter-finals. The 25th-ranked South Americans have never made the last eight before but they are brimming with confidence after grinding down Jamaica 1-0 on Tuesday thanks to a goal from their skipper.

They will now play England in Sydney on Saturday and are fearless, having beaten world number two Germany in the group stage. "Because of their football and their history we need to be careful, we need to be cautious," Abadia said of Sarina Wiegman's strongly fancied England. "But in football we have already seen that the gaps between teams have been closing down and Colombia have proven to be a solid team. "Of course, England are one of the favorites, that goes without saying - they are the European champions.

"But we also faced Germany, who were second favorites. We were wise enough and had the composure." Colombia's intense, attacking mindset has served them well so far, with their teenage striker Linda Caicedo one of the stars of the tournament. But Usme is the glue that

keeps them together and she said they were in no mood to stop now.

"We want more," she said, having scored the goal to take Colombia into the last eight. "It's not our ceiling, now we are thinking about England, which is going to be a dream match." "We need to be calm, play an intelligent match, but with the certainty that we can achieve more in this World Cup. "We are dreaming big - we can do this," she added. Abadia has been in charge since 2017 and after failing to qualify for the last tournament in France, has nurtured the likes of Caicedo into the players they are today.

The 67-year-old has made no secret of their intention to at least reach the final and match the feat of Brazil in 2007, when they were runners-up to Germany. No South American team has won the Women's World Cup. "When we qualified for the World Cup the first thing I said to my team is that we are not here just to spend some time - we want to make history and it is better to make history than to tell history," he said. "We have consolidated a very strong group, both for the technical staff and for the players. "We brought the 23 best players from our country and we know how mature, how good they are." — AFP



Colombia's forward Catalina Usme

## India cricket board makes \$1.5 billion surplus in 5 years

NEW DELHI: India's cricket board earned a surplus of around \$1.5 billion in the five years to 2021-22, the country's parliament heard during a rare look into the sporting body's

finances. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) does not typically publish its finances in detail. But it is known to be one of the world's most lucrative governing bodies thanks to India's diehard love of the game and periodic bidding wars over broadcast rights.

A government minister listed recent BCCI earnings in parliament on Tuesday which revealed revenue of \$919 million and expenditure of \$370

million for the year to March 2022, leaving a surplus of \$549 million. It was the board's biggest surplus out of the five years from 2017-18, with earnings of \$3.3 billion and \$1.8 billion in expenses for the same period. The all-powerful BCCI is often said to call the shots in world cricket due to their outsized wealth compared to other national cricket boards.

The BCCI also stands to earn approximately \$230 million per year

between 2024-27 - or 38.5 percent of the International Cricket Council's annual earnings of \$600 million, according to ESPN Cricinfo. Last year, the BCCI sold its media rights for the wildly popular Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament for a whopping \$6.2 billion. The board has recently floated a tender for media rights for its international and domestic matches which is set to reap another huge windfall. — AFP

## Newcomers to look out for in La Liga

BARCELONA: The 2023/24 La Liga season kicks off this weekend with Barcelona attempting to defend their title from a Real Madrid side that bid farewell to Karim Benzema this summer. With Spain's top two clubs adopting different approaches in the transfer market, AFP Sport picks out five new signings to watch this season in La Liga:

## Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid)

The England international announced his arrival at the Santiago Bernabeu by choosing the number five shirt as a tribute to club great Zinedine Zidane. Signed for an initial fee of 103 million euros (\$112 million) from Borussia Dortmund, the 19-year-old Bellingham represents Madrid's future, with the chance to further refine his game alongside veteran midfielders Luka Modric and Toni Kroos, players he will eventually phase out with young French duo Eduardo Camavinga and Aurelien Tchouameni. Bellingham shone for England at last year's World Cup but could only watch from the bench in despair as the German title slipped from Dortmund's grasp on the final day of the season.

## Ilkay Gundogan (Barcelona)

The captain of Manchester City's treble-winning team, Ilkay Gundogan turned down a new contract to move to the Camp Nou on a free transfer after seven hugely successful seasons under Pep Guardiola. The

Germany international, who turns 33 in October, will strengthen a Barcelona midfield with plenty of options, including young Spaniards Pedri and Gavi, and Dutchman Frenkie de Jong. Barcelona turned to Gundogan after failing to lure Lionel Messi back at the end of his deal with Paris Saint-Germain, the Argentine instead heading to Inter Miami where he has since been joined by former Barca team-mates Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba. Oriol Romeu, whose path to the Barcelona first team was once blocked by Busquets, is also back at his boyhood club after moving from Girona.

## Arda Guler (Real Madrid)

Signed from Fenerbahce under the noses of arch rivals Barcelona for a reported 20 million euros (\$21.7 million), Madrid hope the Turkish teenage prodigy—who has drawn comparisons with Messi—will form part of a new generation of "Galacticos". A left-footed playmaker, the 18-year-old in June became the youngest player to score for Turkey. He made his Fenerbahce debut aged 16 in a Europa League qualifier two years ago and broke the record as the club's youngest league goalscorer barely two weeks after his 17th birthday. Guler signed a six-year contract with Madrid but will start the season on the sidelines while recovering from a knee injury.

## Cesar Azpilicueta (Atletico Madrid)

The Spain defender returns to his homeland after 13 years abroad, 11 of those with Chelsea, where he won all major honours at club level. Azpilicueta penned a one-year deal with Atletico after leaving Chelsea in a summer clearout under new manager Mauricio Pochettino. He made 508 appearances for the Blues, twice winning the Premier League and captaining Chelsea to a sec-



Jude Bellingham

ond Champions League crown in 2021. The 33-year-old brings a wealth of experience to an Atletico team that again came third last term after a much improved second half of the campaign under Diego Simeone.

## Andre Silva (Real Sociedad)

Once touted as the heir apparent to Cristiano Ronaldo for Portugal, Silva's career has stalled somewhat after his breakout season with Eintracht Frankfurt two years ago. Now 27, Silva has joined Real Sociedad on a season-long loan from RB Leipzig as the Basque club return to the Champions League for the first time in a decade after finishing fourth in La Liga last term. The former Porto, AC Milan and Sevilla striker has spent pre-season recovering from a thigh problem, but La Real are counting on him to rediscover his best form after namesake David Silva announced his retirement last month following a serious knee injury. — AFP

## City aim to hold off big-spending pretenders

MANCHESTER: Manchester City begin the defense of their Premier League title away to newly-promoted Burnley on Friday as Pep Guardiola's men look to hold off an ambitious group of challengers to their crown as English champions. Arsenal and Manchester United have spent big to try and end their long wait for a league title, while Liverpool and Chelsea are expected to bounce back from last season's disappointment. But another transfer window of major investment by English clubs has been overshadowed by the lavish sums luring even some of the Premier League's best talent to Saudi Arabia.

## City still the benchmark

City not only won the Premier League for a fourth time in five years last season, but completed a treble of FA Cup and the club's first ever Champions League. Maintaining his side's hunger is the task awaiting Guardiola, but the Catalan coach is confident City will rise to the challenge of becoming the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles.

"We have done it in the past, why should we not do it now? What we did belongs in our hearts and minds but while we are here we cannot stop," said Guardiola. City have lost captain Ilkay Gundogan to Barcelona and Riyad Mahrez to the exodus from Europe to Saudi. The arrival of Croatian internationals Josko Gvardiol and Mateo Kovacic has softened that blow, but the champions have been quiet in the market compared to the chasing pack.

Arsenal were second last season and have splashed out over £200 million (\$255 million) on Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber in an attempt to go one better this time. The Gunners saw an immediate reward by beating City on penalties to win the Community Shield on Sunday and goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale believes victory at Wembley was an important psychological hurdle for Arsenal to clear.

"For us it's a statement," said Ramsdale. "It's a marker to know we can go and beat Man City in a big game when it matters. I'm not sure what it will be like this season but that mental block is gone. We're ready to push on now." United remain in limbo off the field as talks over a potential takeover of the Red Devils drag on. But manager Erik ten Hag has still been handed his desired targets with the arrival of goalkeeper Andre Onana, midfielder Mason Mount and Denmark striker Rasmus Hojlund. United finished third and won the League Cup in Ten Hag's first season, but have gone a decade without a Premier League title.

## Saudi threat

Liverpool are not in the Champions League for the first time in seven years after finishing fifth last season. A mid-



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola

field overhaul at Anfield has been accelerated by the departures of captain Jordan Henderson and Fabinho to Saudi Arabia with Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai coming in. "At the moment it looks like they have quite an influence. It is massive," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp on the emerging threat in the Gulf to the Premier League's status as the world's leading league.

However, Newcastle - who are 80 percent owned by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund - have so far added just Italian midfielder Sandro Tonali and winger Harvey Barnes from relegated Leicester. New Chelsea boss Mauricio Pochettino has overseen a huge clearout at Stamford Bridge to trim down a bloated squad that sank to 12th last season. Tottenham are also

under new management, but the early days of Ange Postecoglou's reign have been overshadowed by the doubt over whether Harry Kane will leave to join Bayern Munich.

## Luton's fairytale rise

As hundreds of millions are spent jostling for positions at the top end of the table, Luton Town are spending big just to get their 10,000 capacity stadium Kenilworth Road up to scratch for life in the top flight. Luton have risen from the fifth-tier National League to the Premier League in just 10 seasons. The Hatters, who begin their campaign away to Brighton, will have to wait for a first home game until at least next month after a clash with Burnley was postponed to allow extra time for stadium upgrades to be completed. — AFP



Julen Lopetegui

## Lopetegui resigns as Wolves coach

LONDON: Julen Lopetegui has left his job as Wolves coach just days before the start of the Premier League season after reportedly being unhappy over the club's recruitment policy. "Wolves and Julen Lopetegui have reached an agreement to part ways, ending the Spaniard's nine-month reign as head coach at the club," Wolves said in a statement on Tuesday. "The head coach and club acknowledged and accepted their differences of opinion on certain issues and agreed that an amicable end to his contract was the best solution for all parties."

Former Bournemouth head coach Gary O'Neil, sacked this summer after steering the Cherries to top-flight safety, is reported to be in line to replace Lopetegui. Former Spain and Real Madrid boss Lopetegui joined Wolves in November, replacing Bruno Lage, with the club bottom of the Premier League and helped them stay in the top flight, finishing 13th.

But the 56-year-old was said to be frustrated by their approach in the transfer market, with a number of first-team players departing this summer and few replacements found. Wolves have sold the likes of Ruben Neves, Conor Coady, Nathan Collins and Raul Jimenez and have only brought in two players on free transfers - Matt Doherty and Tom King.

The club's statement added: "Talks have been ongoing in recent weeks, held with the utmost respect and cordiality, affording the club time and space to begin work on finding a successor, while also ensuring that Julen and his backroom staff could continue their planned preparation to ensure the playing squad would be in the best possible condition for the start of the Premier League season." In his own statement Lopetegui said: "I wish Wolves and everybody at the club the very best of luck for the future, and thank them for the opportunity granted at the time to take charge of this wonderful club.

"It has been an honour to enjoy this adventure. Also, of course, I want to thank the players, who have always given the maximum to achieve our objectives, and especially the fans that made me feel like one of them from the very first moment and have always been amazing to me, my staff and my family." Lopetegui, whose backroom staff of Pablo Sanz, Juan Peinado, Oscar Caro, Edu Rubio, Borja De Alba Alonso and Daniel Lopetegui will also leave, took over with the club in dire straits.

## 'Great shape'

He won nine league games from that point, beating Liverpool and Tottenham at Molineux, as the club finished safely in mid-table to extend their top-flight stay into a sixth season. "On behalf of everyone at the club I'd like to thank Julen and his staff for their dedication and hard work during their time at the football club," said sporting director Matt Hobbs. "They were brought in with the primary aim of keeping the club in the Premier League last season, an objective which they achieved with games to spare.

"While our ambition had been to move into the new season together, it is public knowledge that there were differences of opinion on some key topics, and it was agreed by all parties that it would be best to part ways ahead of the new campaign. "After a successful pre-season, full of hard work and good performances, Julen and his staff leave the squad in great shape ahead of the season opener next week, which will give his successor the best possible platform for success." Wolves open their season away to Manchester United on Monday. — AFP

## Uncertainty over Mbappe future hangs over Ligue 1

### Contract dispute clouds new season

**PARIS:** Uncertainty over the future of Kylian Mbappe hangs over French football ahead of the new Ligue 1 season, which starts this weekend. The Paris Saint-Germain superstar has won France's player of the year award four times in a row and been Ligue 1's top scorer in five straight seasons, but his contract dispute with the champions has dominated headlines all summer. Mbappe has refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, meaning he can leave for free next year, with Real Madrid long seen as his preferred destination.

PSG want to sell him now and bring in a significant transfer fee for a player who cost 180 million euros (\$198m) from Monaco in 2017. A stand-off has ensued, and for now Mbappe remains in Paris but has been reduced to training apart from the first team. "We can't let the best player in the world today leave for free. It's impossible," said the Qatar-owned club's president, Nasser Al-Khelaifi, last month.

The situation is hardly ideal for PSG's new coach, with Luis Enrique having been appointed to succeed Christophe Galtier. Regardless of what happens with Mbappe, PSG have a new look after limping to the title in the last campaign and failing to impress in Europe. Lionel Messi has gone, so has Sergio Ramos. They needed attacking reinforcements even if Mbappe stays, and Portugal striker Goncalo Ramos has joined from Benfica.

The arrivals of Lucas Hernandez, Milan Skriniar, Manuel Ugarte, Lee Kang-in and Marco Asensio mean they look stronger across the pitch. "I could have stayed at Bayern Munich, but the interest PSG showed in me, their ambition and the project they are trying to put in place for the future convinced me to come," Hernandez told sports daily L'Equipe. PSG begin as overwhelming favorites to win a 10th title in 12 years, but their domestic rivals might sense their chance if Mbappe moves on.

#### Changing landscape

The French football landscape is changing. Ligue 1 has been reduced to 18 clubs. The move, after over two decades with 20 teams in the top flight, has been made with the aim of helping French clubs become more competi-

tive in Europe by having fewer league games.

Despite that, and despite seeing Messi depart and Mbappe maybe follow, the French league is hoping an upcoming auction for the next broadcast deal will allow it to make far more money than it does currently, especially for international rights. League executives want their competition to be able to rival those in England, Spain, Germany and Italy for international popularity, but the growing trend of multi-club ownership threatens to turn several French sides into feeder teams. Strasbourg have been taken over by BlueCo, the US-led consortium that owns Chelsea.

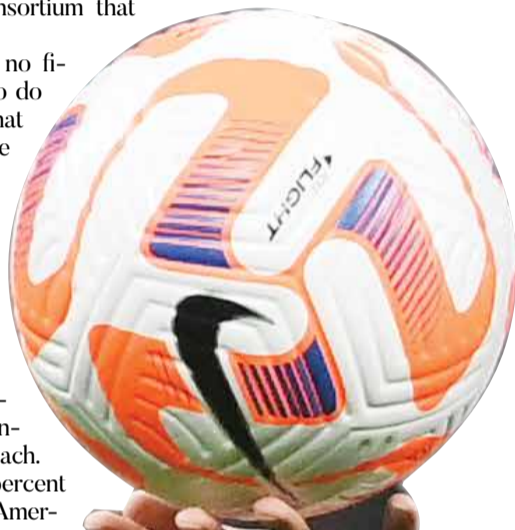
"Although there was no financial urgency for us to do so, we were conscious that we had gone as far as we could with our existing model," said Strasbourg's president, Marc Keller. He refutes any suggestion that Strasbourg, French champions in 1979, will become a mere feeder team, and they have appointed former Crystal Palace manager Patrick Vieira as coach. Lorient are now 40 percent owned by Bill Foley, the American owner of Premier League club Bournemouth. The Brittany side have made headlines by signing Benjamin Mendy following his acquittal in England of sex offences.

#### Ambitious Marseille

Once the dominant French team, uncertainty surrounds Lyon's prospects in their first full campaign since American businessman John Textor bought the club. Textor also owns Brazilian side Botafogo and Belgian club Molenbeek, and holds a significant share in Crystal Palace.

However, his failure to convince the DNCG, French football's financial watchdog, of the soundness of his spending plans means a cap has been imposed on their wage bill. They have not been able to significantly strength-

en a squad that finished seventh last season, outside the European places. Last season's runners-up Lens have lost captain Seko Fofana to Saudi Arabia and top scorer Lois Openda to RB Leipzig but will hope to remain competitive even with the addition of Champions League football. Marseille, now with former Valencia coach Marcelino in charge, look potentially the best placed to challenge PSG



France's forward Kylian Mbappe

## Fast, cool, deadly: Miyazawa sparks World Cup charge

**TOKYO:** Hinata Miyazawa had never been prolific for club or country before the Women's World Cup - now she is the tournament's leading scorer and spearheading Japan's surprise title charge. The 23-year-old already has five goals in four matches and has Sweden in her sights in Friday's quarter-final in Auckland. "I honestly didn't think I could score this much," Miyazawa told reporters after her ice-cold finish in the 81st minute polished off Norway in the last 16. It was typical of how Miyazawa, who plays in Japan's domestic women's league, has been at the World Cup: cool, calculating and deadly.

#### Deadly composure

It is also noticeable that she has scored with both feet and rather than trying to smack the ball into the net, it is all about precision and placement. Expectations were low at home ahead of the tournament that Japan could repeat their World Cup title success of 2011. Miyazawa had only scored four times in more than 20 appearances for her country. But Japan are playing some of the best

football at the World Cup and Miyazawa's five goals equal the number that Homare Sawa achieved in the 2011 title success.

Miyazawa's goal haul is all the more surprising because she has scored only four times in 39 appearances for her club MyNavi Sendai over the past two seasons. Miyazawa is often described as a midfielder but Dan Orlowitz, a sports writer for The Japan Times, said Japan coach Futoshi Ikedo has found a way to get goals out of her thanks to a 3-4-3 system that allows his team to be deadly on the break.

Miyazawa's goals have mainly come from her running at speed from deep. "It's because of how Japan is so well organised at the back that they are able to set her up," Orlowitz told AFP. "It's a system that suits her abilities, and her abilities suit the system," he said. It was Japan's 4-0 thumping of Spain in the group phase that really made the rest of the World Cup sit up and take notice. Miyazawa scored twice, once with each foot. "She has speed and is also a good finisher and adept at counter-attacking," Japanese football commentator Sergio Echigo told AFP. "She is also very calm and doesn't panic right before she is about to score a goal," he added.

#### Trademark hairband

Born in Kanagawa prefecture outside Yokohama, Miyazawa fell in love with football while at kindergarten and in school was inspired by Japan's 2011 World Cup win. The triumph by the team, nicknamed the "Nadeshiko" after a pink flower, helped lift Japan following the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster earlier that year.

Miyazawa joined Tokyo Verdy Belezza in 2018. The same year she helped Japan win the Under-20 World Cup and was selected for the senior team. Echigo said that the Japan team doesn't really have a standout star, but in Miyazawa, with her trademark hairband, he sees a possible contender. The hairband is in homage to Nahomi Kawasumi, another hero of the 2011 World Cup-winning squad, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper said. "I hope we'll see a hero emerge from the World Cup this time," said Echigo. — AFP



Japan's midfielder Hinata Miyazawa

## It's Women's World Cup! Where are the woman coaches?

**AUCKLAND:** The World Cup in Australia and New Zealand has showcased the strides made in women's football on the field in recent years—while exposing the lack of woman coaches at all levels of the sport. As the tournament heads into the quarter-finals, England boss Sarina Wiegman is the only woman left on the touchline. The first 32-team Women's World Cup began with 12 woman coaches.

That's 37.5 percent, exactly the same as at the World Cup in 2019, when nine of the 24 teams in France had a woman at the helm. "It is a problem not only on the international stage but at every level in the women's game," said Randy Waldrum, the American coach of the Nigeria team that lost on penalties to Wiegman's England in the last 16. "We need more women coaching in the sport." In England, where women's football is highly professional, five of the 12 teams in the Women's Super League finished last season with a woman manager.

In some other countries, including at the World Cup, women's football has only recently turned professional or even remains an amateur sport. Many within the game believe that more woman coaches will inevitably filter through once women's football has had longer to take hold. "There's naturally more male coaches," Wales manager Gemma Grainger told Sky Sports earlier this year. "The men's game has been professional for much longer and we see that transfer of male coaches into the women's game, and that's the state we're at in this moment."

#### Trailblazer Wiegman

The hope is that the ratio will grow in the coming years, especially if current players convert to coaching when their careers end. Although the proportion of woman coaches at this World Cup is the same as four years ago, there are hints of isolated progress. Shui Qingxia played for China at the inaugural Women's World Cup in 1991 and was in charge of the team at this edition, becoming the first woman to coach China. "What we hope is that that balance gets right in the future and we are working on that, at least in England," said Wiegman. "And I know in a lot of other countries too, to give opportunities to have more women in the game and hopefully also more coaches in the game."

Wiegman is the standard-bearer for woman man-



Sarina Wiegman

agers, having won the European Championship with her native Netherlands in 2017 before taking them to the World Cup final two years later. She then won the Euro again last year with England. The Lionesses are favorites to lift the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, and if they do, Wiegman will be the third woman coach in a row to win it.

The USA lifted back-to-back World Cups in 2015 and 2019 under Jill Ellis. At the previous three Olympics, Bev Priestman with Canada, Silvia Neid (Germany) and Pia Sundhage (United States) have all managed teams to gold. The 2019 Women's World Cup final was the second, after 2003, to feature a woman in both dugouts. That will not be repeated this year after Hege Riise's Norway, Inka Grings' Switzerland and Desiree Ellis's South Africa were all beaten in the last 16.

#### 'Old boys' mentality

Waldrum, who has spent much of his career coaching women's teams at college level in the United States, said there needed to be investment and a change of mindset. "It is not that men shouldn't be coaching," said Waldrum, who also had a spell in charge of Trinidad and Tobago. "I think that if they love the women's game and they are invested in it, then we should have the opportunity to do it, but certainly we need bigger investment in women and women coaching."

He said it was also a question of "changing the old boys' club mentality too. That women can coach and can be very effective". Jamaica's Lorne Donaldson said that nothing should be read into the dominance of male coaches in the latter stages of this year's tournament. "It is just one of those things that happened, that there is one female coach left," he said. "And she might turn around and win it all, who knows?" — AFP