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Meteorologist predicts light rain and humidity

Despite scorching July, Paris climate limit not yet reached

KUWAIT: Kuwait Meteorological Department declared on Thursday that the country would be sprayed with some light rain over the weekend amid proceeding high heat and humidity. Forecaster Yasser Al-Bloushi said in a statement to KUNA the country would continue to be affected by the seasonal Indian depression, along with unstable hot and humid air flows.

The heat will range between 44 to 46 degrees and will drop at night to the 32-34 degrees level. On Friday, the maximum level of the temperature would be between 46 and 48 degrees during day time and 32 and 34 degrees at night. He also reported some scattered drizzles the same day. On Saturday, Al-Bloushi said the temperature would at the 46-48 degrees level and fall to 32-35 degrees at night. Last month, the temperature in Kuwait soared above the 50 degrees threshold.

The average global temperature in July, the hottest month in recorded history, was around 1.5 degrees Celsius warmer than in pre-industrial times. The Paris Agreement set the ambitious target of limiting the world to a temperature increase of 1.5C, but last month's blistering heat does not mean this threshold has been breached - the deal instead refers to change that takes place over decades.

The month of July was "estimated to have been around 1.5C warmer than the average for 1850-1900," the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Ser-

vice said on Tuesday. It also confirmed that July was the hottest on record for any month. But it is not the first time that the 1.5C threshold has been temporarily reached - or even exceeded.

In December 2015, just as nations were convening in the French capital to negotiate the landmark Paris Agreement, the world experienced average global temperatures above 1.5C pre-industrial levels as the Pacific Ocean warming phenomenon El Nino neared its peak. The limit was also reached or passed in the winter or early spring of 2016, 2020, and earlier this year. With the first El Nino in four years just warming up, more records could fall in the coming years.

The Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 with the goal of holding the "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2C above pre-industrial levels" and to pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels". But just one hot month does not mean that the lower threshold has been breached. "It must be stressed that the 1.5C and 2C limits set in the Paris Agreement are targets for the average temperature of the planet over the 20 or 30-year periods typically used to define climate," Copernicus said in a statement in June.

The World Meteorological Organization estimates there is a 66 percent chance that the annual average global temperature will temporarily exceed pre-in-

dustrial levels by more than 1.5C for at least a year between 2023-2027. "This is not to say that in the next five years we would exceed the 1.5C level specified in the Paris Agreement because that agreement refers to long-term warming over many years," the WMO's director of climate services Chris Hewitt said in July. "However, it is yet another wake-up call, or an early warning" he added.

The Paris Agreement does not provide a precise definition for the temperatures it refers to, unlike the specific years given for the pre-industrial benchmark, but scientists have attempted to clear up any ambiguity. In a 2018 IPCC special report, climate experts urged the world to aim for the lower limit rather than 2C to avoid major climate impacts, such as heatwaves, super hurricanes and destabilized ice caps.

They defined warming as "the increase in the 30-year global average" expressed relative to "the reference period 1850-1900." "The 30-year timespan accounts for the effect of natural variability, which can cause global temperatures to fluctuate from one year to the next," the IPCC said. In defining the pre-industrial timeframe, which refers to the period before the climate was altered by fossil fuels emitted by human activities, the scientists chose 1850-1900 because it was "the earliest period with near-global observations," it added.— Agencies



KUWAIT: Pedestrians shield themselves from the heat with umbrellas as they cross a pedestrian bridge during heat-wave in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Indian myna bird 'poses no threat'



A couple of Indian myna bird in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait Environmental Lenses Rashed Al-Hajji said Thursday that Indian myna bird poses no threat to Kuwait environment but rather enriches the country's wildlife. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Hajji added that myna bird is social and intellectual creature and has the ability to stimulate voices and adjust to any environment saying that the bird has been known in Kuwait for more than 30 years. Indian myna bird is mostly located in south of Asia and is considered as an intruder to the Arab peninsula but managed to adjust to the harsh environment. — KUNA (See Page 2)

36 die as wildfire turns Hawaiian town to ashes

KAHULUI: At least 36 people have died after a fast-moving wildfire turned a historic Hawaiian town to ashes, officials said Wednesday, as visitors asked to leave the island of Maui found themselves stranded at the airport. The fires began burning early Tuesday, scorching thousands of acres and putting homes, businesses and 35,000 lives at risk on Maui, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency said in a statement.

Strong winds and dry conditions put much of the state under a fire warning on Wednesday, with more fires burning on Hawaii's Big Island, the state agency said. "As the firefighting efforts continue, 36 total fatalities have been discovered today amid the active Lahaina fire," the Maui county government said in a statement.

Continued on Page 6



HAWAII: Photo shows smoke billowing from destroyed buildings as wildfires burn across Maui, Hawaii. — AFP

Kuwait bans hit movie 'Barbie'

KUWAIT: Kuwait has barred hit film "Barbie" from cinemas over concerns about "public ethics", officials have said, also confirming a separate ban on a horror movie featuring a transgender actor. "Barbie"

and "Talk to Me" both "promulgate ideas and beliefs that are alien to the Kuwaiti society and public order", Lafa Al-Subeie, head of Kuwait's cinema censorship committee, told KUNA.

While deciding on any foreign movie, the committee usually orders "censoring of the scenes that run counter to public ethics", Subeie was quoted as saying late on Wednesday. "But (if) a film carries alien concepts, message or unacceptable behavior, the committee decides to bar the stuff in question as a whole," he said.

Iraq's extreme temperatures a 'wake-up call'

BAGHDAD: Iraq's rising temperatures and protracted drought are a "wake-up call" for the world, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said in Baghdad on Wednesday. Turk spoke to AFP during a visit to Iraq, which the UN says is one of the five countries in the world most touched by some effects of climate change.

Iraq has been experiencing its fourth consecutive summer of drought, and temperatures in parts of the country including the capital Baghdad, and in the far south, have been around 50 degrees Celsius (120 degrees Fahrenheit). "Rising temperatures plus the drought, and the fact that the loss of diversity is a reality, is a wake-up call for Iraq and for the world," Turk said.

"When we look into the situation of these communities we look into our future," he added. "The era of global boiling has come and here we can live it and see it on a daily basis," Turk said at the end of his four-day visit, echoing comments by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last month. Guterres had said: "The era of global warming has ended. The era of global boiling has

arrived." He called for immediate and bold action, after scientists confirmed July was on track to be the hottest month in recorded history.

In addition to declining rainfall and rising temperatures, Iraqi authorities say upstream dam construction by Turkey and Iran has affected the volume of water in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers through Iraq. In Iraq's far south, high salinity has harmed fishing in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, where the Tigris and Euphrates converge before spilling into the Gulf. Turk, who visited the south, told a news conference that he was shown by community leaders and others "pictures of the lush date palm trees that—just 30 years ago—lined parts of the now dried-up Shatt al-Arab waterway". — AFP

Enforce law equally, Sheikh Talal urges graduated women officers

226 women officers graduate from Women Police Academy



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah with the newly-graduated women police officers. - KUNA

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Thursday urged a new batch of graduated women police officers to enforce law "equally on everybody." The minister, addressing the 13th batch of the female cadets of the Women Police Academy, called on them

to fulfill their duties and serve the homeland devoutly.

According to a statement by the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled relayed to the 226 freshly graduated officers greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Moreover, the minister of interior urged the graduated officers to honor their vow as a solid doctrine and work method while carrying out security missions.

He also advised them to spare no efforts in serving the homeland and the citizens. Security of the homeland and the na-

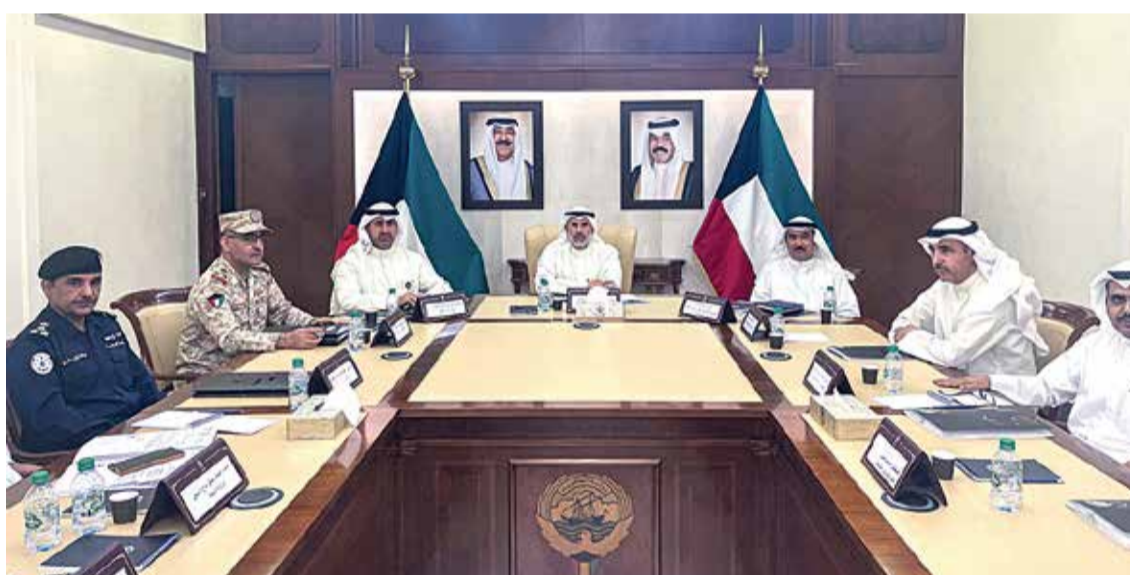
tional is a grand responsibility that must be preserved, he said. He advised them to exert more efforts, double their work and donations, and provide everything that would provide security and safety for citizens, and to deal elegantly with everyone, pointing out that the security of the homeland and citizens is a great respon-

sibility that must be preserved, wishing them success in their practical lives. The graduation ceremony was attended by the Interior Undersecretary Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Abrjas, the assistant undersecretary for education and training, Major General Badr Al-Baloul and other chiefs. — KUNA

Kuwait Deputy FM chairs border committee meeting

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presided over on Wednesday a meeting by the committee on the borders to discuss the issues on the agenda of the committee.

Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah also held talks with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq Claudio Cordone. The meeting was held on Monday during a visit to Kuwait by Cordone, the deputy special representative for the political affairs and electoral assistance of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release on Wednesday. Sheikh Jarrah Jaber and Cordone discussed ways of cooperation between Kuwait and the UNAMI, according to the statement. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over a meeting on the borders. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq Claudio Cordone.

Indian myna bird poses no threat to Kuwait environment

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait Environmental Lens- es Rashed Al-Hajji said on Thursday that Indian myna bird poses no threat to Kuwait environment but rather enriches the country's wildlife.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Hajji added that myna bird is social and intellectual creature and has the ability to stimulate voices and adjust to any environment saying that the bird has been known in Kuwait for more than 30 years.

Indian myna bird is mostly located in south of Asia and is considered as an intruder into the Arab peninsula but managed to adjust to the harsh environment. The common myna is readily identified by the brown body, black hooded head and the bare yellow patch behind the eye.

The bill and legs are bright yellow. There is a white patch on the outer primaries and the wing lining on the underside is white, Al-Hajji added. The nesting period for the myna bird starts in April and lasts till July in India and they prefer to build their nests on cliff edges and even in suburban buildings. — KUNA



Indian myna, doves and Bulbul spotted together in Kuwait.



Indian myna feeding on insects.

Kuwait National Library holds kids' workshop

KUWAIT: Exciting scenes unfolded at the Kuwait National Library as enthusiastic children dived into a world of discovery through captivating workshops. Organized in collaboration with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, these workshops were a resounding success. The workshops brought stories to life, sparked interactive exploration, and even ventured into the cosmos with an enthralling astronomy session.

Participants learned about the vital task of cleaning coastlines and rescuing trapped creatures. The Kuwaiti diving team added an element of aquatic adventure, and young minds found inspiration in constructing imaginative LEGO creations. The workshops left a trail of excited young learners, eager to embrace the world of science, arts, and teamwork. — KUNA



Children during the workshop.



Kids during a story reading session at Kuwait National Library. — KUNA photos

KD 343 average expat income in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Official data revealed that the average salaries of expatriates in the public and private sectors witnessed an increase of about KD 22 during the first six months of this year, as the average monthly wage for citizens increased from KD 1,491 by the end of December 2022, to about KD 1,513 by the end of June 2023.

In detail, the average monthly wage of citizens working in the government sector increased from KD 1,539 per month at the end of December 2022 to KD 1,555 by the end of last June, while the average salary of citizens working in the private sector increased from KD 1,255 to KD 1,297 during the same period. The average monthly wage for expatriates in Kuwait increased by about KD 5 per month, recording about KD 343 at the end of last June, compared to KD 338 at the end of December 2022, the data added.

Local

Kuwait's culture of costly cafes

Coffee shops become 'Instagram-worthy' to woo customers



Global coffee markets are beginning to intertwine with the local coffee brands.



Well-known coffee brands use specific tactics to increase their local consumer count.



Coffee places are now rated by how 'Instagram-worthy' they are.

By Noor Abdulaziz

KUWAIT: Coffee culture in Kuwait is on the rise, and with it comes consequences in the market. In the beginning, it was a new start with specialty coffee that differentiated one brand from another. These coffee brands used specific tactics to increase their local consumer count. However, nowadays, almost half of these cafes share a somewhat identical menu with different price points — all of them unreasonably priced. Moreover, global markets are beginning to intertwine with these local coffee brands, and due to the expanding coffee market, one would think the prices would be rational; however, this is not the case.

"Cafes in Kuwait aren't what they used to be. People used to go to their favorite coffee shop and order their usual drink of choice at a fair price. Nowadays, people look for 'hotspots' rather than places that offer good quality coffee. Initially, they would go for the coffee but would stay for the atmosphere," avid coffee consumer Khaled said.

"Recently, the focus has shifted towards social media and coffee places are now rated by how 'Instagram-worthy' they are, and cafes are taking this to their advantage by creating spaces grab the consumer's attention, not to mention the seasonal trendy drinks and desserts that cost a fortune. What's funny is that people complain about the

prices, but still buy them to sit around and take pictures for their socials. The aesthetic of the place almost justifies the mediocre menu — it makes up for it," Khaled added.

Another caffeine addict spoke about the cost of healthy beverages in Kuwait. "Going out for a matcha with friends in Kuwait costs an arm and a leg," Aysha quipped. "Even the simple alteration of my milk of choice adds up to a quarter of the cost, and on top of that, it ends up tasting underwhelming at best. Only several cafes offer it for the same price, and this does not encourage consumers to choose the healthier option, which could lead to an increase in the obesity rate in Kuwait. Some would justify this

by saying that shipping said products from across the globe is what makes them expensive. However, you can easily find similar products in local markets," she pointed out.

A former business owner gave insights on what it's really like to survive in the market. "The reason is that teas such as matcha and sakura are very expensive. For example, if imported from Singapore, it will notch up an additional cost. So, that could be the only justification why these products are obscenely costly, because we can't find them locally," he said.

"Sometimes, business owners deal with greedy suppliers. For example, they'd sell some products at a high

price, which forces the owner to mark up to make a profit and stay in business to make up for the astronomical rent and pay fair salaries to employees. Kuwait has a competitive market, and every owner is trying to stay in business without losing customers or money," he explained.

With cafes being the main source of entertainment in Kuwait, new coffee shops are opening daily, which means that chances of this market deflating are nearly impossible. However, it is important for these cafe owners to comprehend that quality is much more important than quantity in terms of selling good products at a practical price.



Summer training program at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity.



Riyadh Al-Sharaf



Salim Al-Baz



Sabah Al-Ahmad Center: Honing skills of youth

KUWAIT: Acting Director General of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, Riyadh Al-Sharaf, affirmed that the center aims to guide young people and develop their skills by applying the concepts of artificial intelligence to meet the various needs of the labor market.

This came in a press statement by Al-Sharaf on

Thursday, on the occasion of the conclusion of the summer training program for the current year, which witnessed the training of 40 male and female students from high school, institutes and universities in cooperation with the Public Authority of Manpower, which lasted for four weeks.

Al-Sharaf explained that the program is a unique opportunity for promising youth to develop the skills of national cadres and discover their potential by providing specialized practical training in terms of carefully designing the program to provide the participants with tools and knowledge that contribute to improving their scientific and practical performance.

About the field of artificial intelligence, technical and technological industries, as well as applied sciences, he said, "The program also aims to train

students to produce projects using science and technology and qualify them for the labor market, appreciating the partnership between the Center and the Authority," he added.

"The center aims to receive Kuwaiti cadres and directing young people towards the field of artificial intelligence and enabling them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to develop innovative projects that improve performance and achieve progress in various industrial and technical fields," he clarified. The training was carried out using the approved (STEM) methodology, as this methodology represents an integrated mixture of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which helps broaden the horizons of thinking and develop creativity and excellence in various fields. — KUNA

KU team ranks high in 'Minus CO2' challenge

KUWAIT: Kuwait University team qualified for the final stage before the final qualifiers in the Minus CO2 Challenge organized by the European Organization of Geologists and Engineers (EAGE) for the year 2023. This is for the first time Kuwait University participates in the Minus CO2 Challenge.

The competition aims to allow participating students to develop plans and strategies that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere, in line with the global vision for a sustainable environment. The competition included students from the



Miteb Al-Khuraynig



Nuwayyer Al-Azmi



Sultan Dowair

Colleges of Science, Engineering and Petroleum to be the first cooperation of its kind in this field, which resulted in the team's success in the first and second stages. The first and second stages witnessed intense competition with international universities, which

resulted in the team qualifying ahead of the rest of the participants.

The team of Kuwait University students includes: Reem Al-Subaie and Sultan Dowair from the College of Engineering and Petroleum, in addition to Nuwayyer Al-Azmi and Miteb Al-Khu-

raynig from the College of Science.

They got into the final stage before the final qualifiers, under the supervision of Dr Uhood Al-Salem, a faculty member in the department of Earth and Environmental Sciences from the College of Science.

Barbie movie ban evokes mixed reactions

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait has announced a ban on the controversial film 'Barbie' in order to safeguard ethics, public order and traditions as it confirmed that the film carries ideas that encourage unacceptable behavior. However, the decision attracted different opinions and the hashtag #Barbie trended on social media platforms with thousands of opponents and supporters of this decision. Professor Abdullah Al-Shayji said that Barbie movie promotes homosexuality, gender reassignment, and feminism, as well as promoting a negative image of men describing patriarchal society. He added, "the movie destroys the values of marriage and family and it encourages women to be independent, which contradicts the principles of sharia, our values and our culture."

Ali Al-Moqadem affirmed that he supports the decision 100 percent, explaining "The movie incites immorality and contains scenes that encourage homosexuality, in addition to forcing wrong concepts, especially since Barbie is something that belongs to children. It is a fashion doll and when it is distorted this way, it affects the new generation's idea about Barbie the doll. He pointed out that the generation is already being spoiled by Netflix and the social media. "We do not need such movies to ruin the culture. This is a conspiracy to make the society tolerate these ideas, especially ideas that are not related to our traditions or religion."

On her part, Arwa Hamid said she watched the Barbie movie online for two reasons because it is her favorite doll, and secondly, because it was widely promoted everywhere, adding, "It was overrated, and I understood the reason behind getting that huge promotion by some politicians in order to promote Western culture. They distorted my love for my favorite childhood doll," she said.

Ahmed Kassab said that women in the Gulf and Kuwait in particular assumed leadership positions politically, athletically, and economically, so there is no need for an idea that promotes that women are oppressed. "The main reason for banning Barbie movie is the dissemination of extremist radical feminist thought, the amount of atheism and the extremist agenda," he added.

Meanwhile, Abdel-Hadi Waheed commented that the Barbie movie does not carry any principles and culture compared to the Oppenheimer movie which obliges a person to read about geography and politics, and modern physics to understand, so that the family should choose the appropriate movie to watch.

While opposing the ban of the film in Kuwait, Ali Ibrahim said that he saw a comment by someone who was talking about how Barbie movie would destroy the family. He said, "If a movie will destroy your family, then it was never raised well. A strong family is not affected by difficult external factors, because the right family will discuss topics and talk about them, while every family member has his/her value and opinion. Thousands of movies, series, and books are available today expressing differing ideas and views. These are not expected to influence negatively our views."

Iqbal Al-Zirqi noted that the banning of Barbie movies in Arab countries, although it does not have any inappropriate scenes, reflects the fear of the patriarchal society about any sign of women's empowerment! Although the film calls for cooperation between both genders, the sensitivity of males in real life is very high. Um Abdullah said she is also against the ban saying "We are afraid of Barbie movies, but we are not afraid of the gangster movies being watched by our teenagers".

News in Brief

Woman arrested for running 'vice den'

KUWAIT: The Public Prosecution released a woman from a GCC country on bail of KD 100 with a travel ban after charging her with running a place to practice "debauchery and vice", by employing people to seduce young men and provide girls for them in exchange of money. The Ministry of Interior arrested the woman and referred her to the public prosecution after obtaining information on her nefarious activities. She used to use an apartment in Salmiya area and another one in Hawally where she used to run her 'vice dens' with the support of girls.

Registration opens for scholarship program

KUWAIT: The General Secretariat of the Council of Private Universities announced on Thursday, the opening of the application for the internal scholarship program 2023/24 for the category of diploma holders and the category of students transferred to internal missions. The secretariat said: "registration will be open for the program from Aug 14 until Aug 23. The general secretariat of the Council of Private Universities called on students wishing to register in the scholarship program to visit its website and view the required conditions.

Salwa Zakat program to honor parents

KUWAIT: The Director of Salwa Zakat of the Programs and Projects Sector at Al-Najat Charitable Association Thamer Al-Suhaib announced the launch of a project called, "parents are benevolent". "The project aims to consolidate the virtue of honoring parents as well as to contribute to bringing happiness to their hearts and alleviating the suffering of families," he explained. Al-Suhaib pointed that the contribution to the project starts from KD 10, indicating: "through this amount we support many charitable projects and endowments inside and outside Kuwait, such as building schools, building hospitals, building mosques, digging wells, endowment projects, and orphanages." — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Maintenance staff work on an electricity transmission tower off Fifth Ring Road. According to official sources, electricity consumption in Kuwait has eased marginally in the country this week after peaking it in July. On Friday, the maximum level of the temperature would be between 46 and 48 degrees Celsius during day time and 32 and 34 degrees at night, according to Kuwait Meteorological Department on Thursday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait youth official hails GCC opportunity to share experiences



Waleed Al-Ansari with Kuwaiti delegates during the Gulf Forum for Youth Volunteering in Salalah.



SALALAH, Oman: Waleed Al-Ansari, Director of the Volunteer Work Department at the Kuwait Youth Public Authority, said that the Gulf Forum for Youth Volunteering, which concluded on Thursday in the Omani city of Salalah, was an opportunity for Gulf youth to exchange experiences in volunteer work and deepen cooperation between them.

Al-Ansari explained after the conclusion of the forum, which began on August 6 under the slogan (Isnad): "The forum aimed to consolidate the culture of volunteerism among Gulf youth, develop their sense of responsibility, interact with others, and highlight pioneering models of youth initiatives."

He stated that the forum included holding a number of workshops and lectures in the fields of volunteering, as well as working papers on the most prominent volunteer work presented by youth teams in this humanitarian field, in addition to field visits to the most important volunteer projects in the city of Salalah.

"The Kuwaiti delegation included a group of distinguished young people in the fields of volunteer work and had a role in enriching the discussions and dialogues at the forum,

as well as presenting distinguished volunteer projects in Kuwait," he said stressing the authority's keenness to involve young people in the most important external forums in various youth fields.

The head of the Volunteer Response and Rescue team in Kuwait, Suleiman Al-Khudari, said: "Participation in this forum was characterized by presenting the successful experiences of volunteer initiatives in each Gulf country to be circulated in the rest of the countries, in addition to exchanging bright ideas in this field." In turn, the young volunteer Farah Al-Shatti explained to KUNA that her presence in the forum gave her greater knowledge and wider knowledge in the field of volunteering and its diversity, praising the keenness of the Youth Authority to support young Kuwaiti volunteers and involve them in such external forums that contribute to refining them and encouraging them to continue in volunteer work.

It is noteworthy that the forum is one of the important activities supervised by the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and is held annually in GCC countries on a rotating basis. — KUNA

Event halls are ready for use: Social Affairs

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Social Affairs announced that it will reopen the completed event halls starting next week, as it will allow booking 12 event halls in various governorates of the country electronically through the applications.

The ministry's official spokesman and director of the Public Relations Department, Ahmed Al-Enezi, said in a press statement on Thursday that this measure was issued based on direct directives from the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah.

He said that the ministry has completed maintenance work for these halls, while work is underway to complete the observations in other halls, to be announced later, noting "the halls that will be available to be reserved will be part of them dedicated to women and others for men and distributed

to all governorates."

Al-Enezi pointed out that the halls available for reservation in Jahra governorate are (Nahar Al-Baghli Hall - women) and (Sheikh Ahmed Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Hall - men) and in Hawally governorate (Sheikh Nasser Saud Al-Sabah Hall Salmiya Association - women) and (Mushrif Association Hall - men).

He added that in the province of Mubarak Al-Kabeer will be (Qurain Wedding Hall - men) and (Sheikh Sabah Al-Jaber Hall - Al-Adan - men) and (Sheikh Badr Al-Mohammed Hall - men).

He stated that in the Capital governorate it will be (Hamoud Al-Zaben Hall - women) and (Sheikhan Al-Farsi Hall - men), while Farwaniya governorate will be (Al-Harbish Hall - men), (Al-Omaria Association Hall - men) and (Al-Firdous Association Hall - men).



Ahmed Al-Enezi



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Ecuadoran presidential candidate shot dead after rally

Ukraine urges evacuations while Russia claims gains

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Sfax: Migrants of African origin trying to flee to Europe are crammed on board of a small boat, as Tunisian coast guards prepare to transfer them onto their vessel, at sea between Tunisia and Italy, on August 10, 2023.— AFP

Tunisia, Libya to share responsibility for sheltering migrants left on border

Over 300 migrants stranded in life-threatening conditions

TUNIS: Tunisia and Libya agreed Thursday to share responsibility for providing shelter for hundreds of migrants stranded for up to a month at their border, after dozens died in the desert. The migrants, primarily from sub-Saharan African countries, had been driven to the remote desert area of Ras Jedir by Tunisian authorities and left there to fend for themselves, according to witnesses, rights groups and UN agencies.

Aid groups said three groups of about 300 migrants in total from sub-Saharan African countries remain stranded there in life-threatening conditions. Since the start of July, "at least 27 migrants" have been found dead after being abandoned in the Tunisian-Libyan border area and another 73 are missing, a humanitarian source told AFP on Thursday.

A spokesman for Tunisia's interior ministry, Faker Bouzghaya, said during a joint meeting with Libyan authorities in Tunis that "we have agreed to share the groups of migrants who are at the border". "Tunisia will take charge of a group of 76 men, 42 women and eight children," Bouzghaya told AFP.

He said the groups were transferred on Wednesday to reception centers in the cities of Tataouine and Medenine and provided with health and psychological care, with the help of the Tunisian Red Crescent. Under the agreement, Libya will take in the remaining 150-200 migrants, humanitarian sources said. The Libyan interior ministry announced the agreement to "put an end to the crisis of

irregular migrants stranded in the border area".

In a later statement, it said there were no more migrants stranded at the border following the agreement, adding that joint patrols were being organized to "secure the border". Racial tensions had flared in Tunisia's second city of Sfax after the July 3 killing of a Tunisian man following an altercation with migrants.

Up to 1,200 black Africans were "expelled, or forcibly transferred by Tunisian security forces" to desert border regions with Libya and Algeria, Human Rights Watch said. The Tunisian Red Crescent had on July 12 provided shelter to about 630 migrants found at Ras Jedir, as well as 200 others who had been pushed towards Algeria, non-governmental groups said.

But AFP journalists and other media reported that about 350 migrants had remained stranded at Ras Jedir in the following weeks. Some 40 kilometers (25 miles) south at Al-Assah, hundreds of other migrants were seen pouring into Libya, with no access to food, water and vital supplies until they were rescued by Libyan border guards in early August, according to an AFP team there.

Until Wednesday, migrants had continued to arrive in Libya at Al-Assah at a rate of about 50 per day before being rescued by Libyan guards, a humanitarian source said. The source said that "around 270 people" are now being housed at Al-Assah after the others were taken elsewhere, said the source who feared that evacuees from Ras Jedir might be sent to detention camps. Lib-

yan authorities have come under sharp criticism from the United Nations over reported violence against migrants, about 600,000 of whom live in the war-scarred North African country.

Deadly shipwreck

Both Libya and Tunisia are major gateways for migrants and asylum seekers attempting perilous voyages in often rickety boats in the hope of a better life in Europe. Mediterranean Sea crossing attempts from Tunisia multiplied in March and April following an incendiary speech by President Kais Saied who had alleged that "hordes" of irregular migrants were causing crime and posing a demographic threat to the mainly Arab country.

Xenophobic attacks targeting black African migrants and students have increased across the country since Saied's February remarks, and many migrants have lost jobs and housing. At least 11 migrants died in a shipwreck off the coast of Sfax, court spokesman Faouzi Masmoudi said on Monday, adding that another 44 were missing and only two were rescued.

The distance between Sfax and Italy's Lampedusa Island is only about 130 kilometers (80 miles). The United Nations has described the central Mediterranean migration route as the world's deadliest, claiming hundreds of lives each year. More than 1,800 people have died attempting the route so far this year, according to International Organization for Migration figures. — AFP

Summit backs diplomacy in Niger crisis

ABUJA: West African leaders on Thursday said they firmly supported diplomacy in the search to end the crisis in Niger, stepping back from a threat to intervene militarily in the coup-stricken country. "We prioritize diplomatic negotiations and dialogue as the bedrock of our approach," said Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, chairing an emergency summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja.

The 15-nation bloc is struggling to stem military takeovers that have now swept through four of its members in three years. Their summit came four days after the expiry of an ultimatum to Niger's coup leaders to reinstate the elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, who was detained by guards on July 26.

But the regime ignored the deadline. "Regrettably, the seven-day ultimatum we issued during the first summit has not yielded the desired outcome," Tinubu acknowledged. "We must engage all parties involved, including the coup leaders, in earnest discussions to convince them to relinquish power and reinstate President Bazoum," he said.

"It is our duty to exhaust all avenues of engagement to ensure a swift return to constitutional governance in Niger." The coup leaders on Thursday signaled further defiance by appointing a new government. The 21-member cabinet will be headed by Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, a civilian, with generals from the new military governing council at the defense and interior ministries.

The possibility of military intervention in Niger, a fragile nation that ranks among the world's poorest, sparked debate within ECOWAS and warnings from neighboring Algeria as well as Russia. Niger's neighbors Mali and Burkina Faso, both ruled by military governments that seized power in coups, also declared an intervention would be a "declaration of war" on their countries.

Hopes for 'real discussions'

On Tuesday, a bid to send a joint team of ECOWAS, UN and African Union representatives to Niger's capital Niamey was rejected by the coup leaders. But in a twist on Wednesday, a former emir of the Nigerian city of Kano said he had met with the coup leaders to help mediate the crisis. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi told Nigerian state television he had spoken to coup leader General Abdourahamane Tiani and would deliver a "message" to Tinubu, though he was not an official government emissary.

"We came hoping that our arrival will pave the way for real discussions between the leaders of Niger and those of Nigeria," said Sanusi, who is known to be a close friend of Tinubu. Current ECOWAS chair Nigeria is taking a hard line against last month's coup, the fifth in Niger since independence from France in 1960.

Speaking before flying to Abuja on Wednesday, Guinea-Bissau's President Umaro Sissoco Embalo said the future of ECOWAS was at stake following coups in four member states—Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and now Niger. Bazoum remains Niger's sole recognized president and coups must be banned, he added. — AFP

Indonesian maid's torture highlights lack of protections

JAKARTA: Beaten, forced to eat animal feces and chained to a dog cage — the abuse of an Indonesian maid highlights the government's failure to protect domestic workers at home even as it moves to help those abroad, critics say. Siti Khotimah left her Central Java hometown for capital Jakarta last year when she found a maid job on Facebook to help her parents with debt.

After months of torture by her employer, the 24-year-old now walks with a limp and has visible burn scars along her legs. "My head hurts every time I think about what happened to me," she said, sobbing. Khotimah's case is not unique in Indonesia, the largest democracy without a bill to protect domestic workers, leaving more than four million people — mostly women — vulnerable to abuse.

Her wealthy 70-year-old employer in south Jakarta was jailed for four years for physical abuse last month, while the woman's husband, daughter and six other maids were all handed three-and-a-half years. Khoti-



JAKARTA: This picture taken on July 27, 2023 shows Siti Khotimah walking with crutches after the physical abuse she suffered by her employer while working as a domestic worker, during an interview at a shelter. — AFP

mah told AFP she was also raped during her employment but was unable to initially talk about it. She has since informed police who advised her to file a separate lawsuit for sexual abuse. "I am very disappointed, the sentence is so light compared to what happened to me. They should have felt what I feel," she said.

while their convoy was near the village of Mudiyah in Abyan province, said the source who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The convoy had been en route to a flashpoint area that has seen regular confrontations with Al-Qaeda fighters. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast which killed Abdulatif al-Sayyid, the commander of the Security Belt Forces in Abyan province.

The force, tasked with protecting southern regions of Yemen, is trained and equipped by the United Arab Emirates and has played a key role in the fight against jihadists. It is loyal to Yemen's secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC),

A domestic worker bill has remained in limbo for nearly two decades and activists accuse the government of dragging its feet. Under the current legal framework, maids are not classified as workers, forcing them to operate in an informal and unregulated economy.

Even if the law does go ahead, it would mainly help those recruited by agents to work overseas, according to advocates. "The law is very discriminatory," lawmaker Willy Aditya, who heads the bill's working committee, told AFP. Women's rights activists say the government must do more to support domestic helpers within Indonesia.

"Khotimah's case is not the first. The government's response has always been slow," said Tiasri Wiandani of the National Commission for Eradication of Violence against Women. "Demanding protection from other countries while we have not fulfilled the responsibilities ourselves is like a slap in our face." Despite the risks and horrifying stories of abuse, women from rural areas like Khotimah feel compelled by poverty to keep moving to big cities for work.

"We owed money in our village. There was no other choice," she said. She told AFP the abuse began a few weeks after her arrival in April 2022 when another worker accused her of petty theft. Khotimah was accused of more theft, which she denied, and the abuse continued until December. — AFP

which confirmed Sayyid's death in a statement.

Sayyid, who led several major offensives against jihadists, had survived several attempts to kill him ordered by Al-Qaeda, the source said. Thursday's bombing comes more than a week after a suspected Al-Qaeda attack killed five soldiers in Wadi Omran in Abyan.

In June, suspected Al-Qaeda militants killed two soldiers at a military checkpoint in the southern province of Shabwa. Yemen erupted into conflict in 2014 when Iran-backed Huthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa, before a Saudi-led military coalition intervened the following year on the side of the country's internationally recognized government. — AFP

Yemen commander dies in suspected Al-Qaeda attack

DUBAI: A bombing in southern Yemen on Thursday killed four fighters loyal to a secessionist force, including a prominent commander who previously survived assassination attempts by Al-Qaeda, a security official said. The roadside bomb detonated

International

Ukraine urges evacuations while Russia claims gains

'People are in danger of losing their lives, not just their homes'

KHARKIV: Ukraine urged civilians near the northeastern front line to evacuate on Thursday as Russia ramped up an assault to capture the territory already once seized during the conflict. Kupiansk and the surrounding areas of Ukraine's Kharkiv region were liberated by Kyiv's forces last September, but Moscow has since pushed back on the region.

"Given the difficult security situation and the increasing amount of shelling by Russian terrorist forces in Kupiansk community, you have the opportunity to evacuate to a safer place," the city administration said, naming 37 settlements wedged between the town and Russian lines.

It said residents could evacuate to Kharkiv, some 56 miles (90 kilometers) west, where they would have the option to move to safer regions, urging children, the elderly and the sick to leave. "Do not neglect your safety and the safety of your loved ones," it said.

The warning came as Russia's defense ministry announced its soldiers had "improved their position" along the front line near the town, after reporting advances earlier in the week. "In the course of offensive operations near Kupiansk, assault teams of the Western battle group improved their positions along the forward edge of the front line," it said in a daily briefing.

'Getting dangerous'

"It looks like the Russians are erasing places in the Kupiansk area," said Rostyslav Melnykiv, professor at a local university in Kharkiv. "People are in danger of losing their lives, not just their homes," he told AFP. One resident in the small town of Kivsharivka just outside of Kupiansk said she was preparing to evacuate with her children, while her husband re-

fused to leave to care for his elderly mother.

"It's hard to leave them behind," Anna Koresh, 36, told AFP by phone. "But since it's getting dangerous it's important to take the kids to a safe place." Ukraine launched its highly anticipated counteroffensive in June after stockpiling Western weapons, but it has acknowledged difficult battles as it struggles to make headway.

Moscow said earlier Thursday it downed 11 Ukrainian drones nearing the Crimean Peninsula and two headed for Moscow, in the latest wave of attacks targeting Russia and Russian-held territory. "As a result of the thwarted terrorist attacks, there were no casualties or damage," the Russian defense ministry said in a statement on Telegram.

Drone attacks

Moscow was largely spared in the early months of the war but the number of drone attacks on the capital has risen in recent months, with the city targeted multiple times this week. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned last month that "war" was coming to Russia, and that the country's "symbolic centers and military bases" would become targets.

On the other side of the front line, an oil depot in Ukraine's Rivne region was destroyed during a "massive drone attack" on Thursday, governor Vitaliy Koval said, adding that emergency services and investigators were on the scene. Those strikes came one day after a Russian attack on Ukraine's southern city of Zaporizhzhia killed two people, officials said.

Zaporizhzhia, a strategically important city on the Dnipro River, lies some 44 kilometers (27 miles) from the frontline. Zelensky posted a video



ZAPORIZHZHIA: Rescuers battle fire outside a destroyed church after a Russian missile strike in Zaporizhzhia, on Aug 10, 2023. — AFP

of the strike on social media, showing a partially damaged church, with smoke rising from a fire burning in the courtyard.

Yuriy Malashko, the head of the Zaporizhzhia region, said Russia had hit a "church and retail outlets" in the city's Shevchenkivskiy district. Nadiya, a

71-year-old Zaporizhzhia resident, told AFP Thursday that she had just gone to bed when the strike hit. "I lay down on the bed — on the edge of my bed — and at the same time, there was a 'bang'. There was black smoke. Glass flew everywhere. I started screaming," she recounted. — AFP

Poland to boost troops to 10,000 at Belarus border

WARSAW: Poland will boost the number of troops at its eastern border with Belarus to 10,000, the defense minister said Thursday, as he warned about potential security risks from the Russian ally. "This will be around 10,000 soldiers," Mariusz Blaszczak told public radio regarding the total troop presence, an increase from the additional number announced the day before.

He said 4,000 soldiers will support the national border agency and the remaining 6,000 will be in the reserve. "We decided to move troops closer to the Belarusian border in order to ... scare the aggressor, so that the aggressor doesn't dare to attack Poland," he added.

Poland has been sounding the alarm on threats that it says neighboring Belarus poses, warning against "provocations" especially involving the Wagner mercenary group currently based in the country. Warsaw says the Wagner fighters could try to cross into Poland or help migrants flood into the European Union.

Last week, Poland accused Minsk of violating its airspace after two Belarusian military helicopters were spotted by inhabitants of the border area. Belarus denied the violation claims, with the defense ministry saying they were "made by the Polish military and political leadership to once again justify the build-up of forces and means near the Belarusian border". — AFP

Bus offers way out to Belarusians fleeing repression

BREST: Lyudmila, 70, has fond memories of traveling freely to Europe from her native Belarus, before its repressive government was slapped with waves of sanctions plunging it into isolation. Strongman Alexander Lukashenko violently put down historic anti-government demonstrations in 2020 and last year helped Russian forces invade Ukraine, sparking flight bans and border closures. Waiting at the last open passenger crossing point to neighboring Poland, Lyudmila, who only provided her first name due to security concerns, recounted hassle-free trips, including to Spain, in the years before the unrest.

"It's all become harder of course," she said, resting on a sunny patch of grass as passengers on her bus to the Polish capital passed through border checks near Brest. The pensioner with heavily drawn eyebrows is one of thousands of Belarusians who now rely on the route to Warsaw to exit the increasingly authoritarian country.

The closed air and rail routes point to how that link has become a lifeline for those fleeing Lukashenko's authoritarian rule — or just holidaying in Europe. Poland has emerged as a safe haven for Belarusians since the demonstrations, and official data show they now make up the second-largest foreign nationality in the country after Ukrainians. Even though she had grown used to flying, Lyudmila has chosen to see the positives in the longer route imposed by politics. "I look at the country-side. I like it. (You can) relax!" she said with a smile.

Western countries imposed the aviation ban over Belarus after Lukashenko scrambled his air force to divert



WARSAW: A tour guide (left) checks the tickets of passengers who wait to board a bus to Minsk, Belarus, at Warsaw West bus station on July 21, 2023. — AFP

a passenger jet to arrest an activist onboard in 2021. Rail links were halted during the pandemic. "The alternative is fine, even if it's a long way and your legs go numb," said Piotr Sadko, who was chatting with his wife on the bus en route to visit their daughter in Germany.

The bus journey from Minsk to Warsaw takes around 12 hours, but there are often delays at the border. "Naturally, if there were no political conflict, it would all be wonderful," he added. Ilya, who has historic family links with Poland and was travelling alongside his girlfriend to the European Union for the first time, said he agreed.

The couple stayed in Belarus after the protests and watched as many friends left. Ilya, who only gave his first name fearing his security, did not link their decision to secure year-long Polish visas to

either the Ukraine war or the protests but recognized the far-reaching impact of the conflict.

"The situation in the world changed after the events of 2022," adding their plans to travel in Europe had come "crashing down" after the protests. "A friend of ours is already waiting in Warsaw. He said, 'Guys, everything is ready, just come and we'll have dinner!'"

In 2020, Poland launched expedited visas for Belarusian tech specialists, touting a "democratic, free-market economic haven". Despite its otherwise contentious record on immigration, Poland is housing more Belarusian political refugees than any other country. Official data show 79,030 Belarusians in the country as of this year — a three-fold increase from before the protests. — AFP

36 die as wildfire turns Hawaiian...

Continued from Page 1

US Coast Guard officers had pulled at least a dozen people from the water as emergency services were overwhelmed by a disaster that appeared to have erupted almost without warning. More than 270 buildings have been damaged or destroyed in the seriously affected town of Lahaina, on the island's west coast, officials said earlier on Wednesday. "Much of Lahaina on Maui has been destroyed and hundreds of local families have been displaced," said Governor Josh Green of the 12,000-resident historic town popular with tourists.

Video posted on social media showed blazes tearing through the heart of the beachfront town and sending up huge plumes of black smoke. "With lives lost and properties decimated, we are grieving with each other during this inconceivable time," Mayor Richard Bissen said in a video posted to the County of Maui's official Facebook page. "In the days ahead, we will be stronger as a (community)..." he added, "as we rebuild with resilience and aloha."

Stranded travelers

Nearly 1,000 people were sheltering in a community center and two gymnasiums in the Maui town of Kahului as of Wednesday night, down from about 2,100 on Tuesday, according to a county Facebook post, citing the American Red Cross. Visitors to Maui were asked by Maui officials to leave the island "as soon as possible," with buses organized to shuttle travelers from a hotel to Kahului Airport in trips that started Wednesday afternoon, according to another county post.

"Due to limited resources in this time of crisis, visitors with vehicles or any means of transportation are being asked to leave Lahaina and Maui as soon as possible," it said. But many travelers were stranded at the Kahului Airport late Wednesday, due



HAWAII: This image obtained from the County of Maui in Hawaii, shows a wildfire in Lahaina. Hawaii wildfires fanned by winds from Hurricane Dora forced evacuation. — AFP

to canceled and delayed flights, with some seen by an AFP journalist left sleeping on the floor.

About two dozen flights going in or out of the airport on Thursday were canceled or delayed, according to website FlightAware. The US military deployed three helicopters to help fight the fires, and others to assist search and rescue operations, the US Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement. Military helicopters aiding firefighting efforts dropped about 150,000 gallons of water in Maui County on Wednesday, US Army Major General Kenneth Hara, the state adjutant general, told a news conference, according to CNN.

"The primary focus is to save lives, and then to prevent human suffering, and then to mitigate great property loss," Hara told reporters. Authorities were working to restore cellular communications across the island and distribute water, he added. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved a state request for federal funding to fight the wildfires, the state emergency management agency said. The FEMA aid allows for three-quarters of eli-

gible firefighting costs to be reimbursed by the federal government, it said.

Lahaina resident Claire Kent said Wednesday that she had seen her neighborhood razed less than an hour after she fled. "The flames had moved all the way down to the end of the neighborhood," she told CNN. "We were pulling out... onto the highway, you look back and there's cars with flames on both sides of the road, people stuck in traffic trying to get out," Kent said, describing the dangerous scene as "something out of a horror movie."

"I know for a fact people didn't get out," she said, adding that homeless people and those without access to vehicles seemed to have been trapped. A first responder who was in the town after the blaze swept through described a scene of devastation. "As you drive down the road... either way you look, it's honestly just rubble," the person told AFP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press. "With how much charred materials there were... I don't think much is alive in there." — AFP

Iran moves four US prisoners to house arrest

WASHINGTON: Four American prisoners in Iran were released Thursday into house arrest, family members said, raising hopes of a deal to allow them to leave the country. The headway on the prisoners — one of them detained for nearly eight years — comes after quiet, exhaustive diplomacy between the adversaries that was believed to touch on ways to unfreeze \$6 billion in Iranian funds held in South Korea. Prisoners Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharqi and Morad Tahbaz and an unidentified fourth American were moved from Tehran's notorious Evin prison to an undisclosed house, a lawyer for the Namazi family said.

Sources said that a fifth American was also part of the discussions and had already been moved in recent weeks to house arrest. "We are grateful that Siamak and the other Americans in Iran are out of Evin prison and will be under house arrest," said Babak Namazi, Siamak's brother. "While this is a positive change, we will not rest until Siamak and others are back home; we continue to count the days until this can happen," he said in a statement.

A lawyer for the Namazi family, Jared Genser, also welcomed the step but cautioned that the Americans were not yet out. "While I hope this will be the first step to their ultimate release, this is at best the beginning of the end and nothing more," he said. All of the detained Americans are of Iranian descent. Iran does not recognize dual nationality and has had hostile relations with the United States since the 1979 Islamic Revolution toppled the pro-Western shah.

Namazi, a businessman, was arrested in October 2015. He was accused of spying on what his family calls laughable evidence such as past affiliations with US think tanks. His father, former UNICEF official Baquer Namazi, was himself arrested as he went to help his son but was finally released last year as his health deteriorated. Tahbaz, an Iranian-American who also holds British nationality, was arrested alongside other environmentalists in January 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in jail for "conspiring with America." — AFP

International

Ecuadoran presidential candidate shot dead after campaign rally

Candidate had uncovered corruption scheme involving previous president

QUITO: A popular Ecuadoran presidential candidate was shot dead while leaving a rally in the nation's capital on Wednesday, prompting President Guillermo Lasso to declare a state of emergency and blame the assassination on organized crime. Fernando Villavicencio, a 59-year-old anti-corruption crusader who had complained of receiving threats, was murdered as he was leaving a stadium in Quito after holding a campaign rally, officials said.

Lasso declared a two-month state of emergency early Thursday following the assassination, but said general elections slated for August 20 would be held as scheduled. "Outraged and shocked by the assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio," the president said in a statement on X, formerly known as Twitter, blaming the killing on "organized crime."

"For his memory and for his fight, I assure you that this crime will not go unpunished." Villavicencio was the second most popular candidate in the presidential race, according to recent opinion polls. "The Armed Forces as of this moment are mobilized throughout the national territory to guarantee the security of citizens, the tranquility of the country and the free and democratic elections of August 20," Lasso said in a YouTube address.

The president also declared three days of national mourning "to honor the memory of a patriot, of Fernando Villavicencio Valencia." "This is a political crime that acquires a terrorist character and we do not doubt that this murder is an attempt to sabotage the electoral process," he added.

Lasso has said he will not seek re-election. President of the National Electoral Council Diana Atamaint said "the date of the elections scheduled for August 20 remain unalterable." Nine other people were injured in the shooting attack, including a candidate running for the national legislature and two policemen, prosecutors said.

One of the alleged attackers was shot and killed by security personnel. And police detonated an explosive device planted in the area, said chief investigator Alain Luna. Carlos Figueroa, a friend of Villavicencio's who was with him at the time of the attack, told local media that the assailants fired around 30 shots. "They ambushed him outside" the sports center, Figueroa said. "Some (of those present) even thought they were fireworks."

The country's main newspaper, El Universo, report-



In this file photo Ecuadorian then journalist Fernando Villavicencio poses for a picture in Lima on April 19, 2017.

ed that Villavicencio was assassinated "hitman-style and with three shots to the head." Prosecutors later said six other suspects were arrested in raids carried out in southern Quito and in a neighboring town, and that Villavicencio's body was brought to a police department and would undergo an autopsy.

'Full weight of the law'

In recent years, Ecuador has been hit by a wave of violence linked to drug trafficking which, in the midst of the electoral process, has already led to the death of a mayor and a parliamentary candidate. The homicide rate has doubled between 2021 and 2022. "Organized crime has gone too far, but the full weight of the law will be applied to them," Lasso said in his post.

According to the latest polls, Villavicencio, a former journalist who wrote about corruption and served in parliament, polled at 13 percent behind lawyer Luisa Gonzalez, who is close to former left-wing president Rafael Correa. Gonzalez and other presidential candidates denounced the murder and said they were suspending their campaigns, local media reported. "We will never allow such acts to go unpunished. When they touch one, they touch all. When one's life is at risk, everyone's life is at risk," Gonzalez wrote on X.

National Court of Justice president Ivan Saquice-



QUITO: A woman is assisted after being wounded after shots were fired at the end of a rally of Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in Quito, on August 9, 2023. — AFP photos

la called Villavicencio's murder "very painful for the country." "I am very hurt and very worried about Ecuador," he said. The United States, Spain, Chile and the Organization of American States observer mission have also condemned the crime. "We are horrified by the tragic attack... Violence cannot win. Democracy can," European Union ambassador to Ecuador Charles-Michel Geurts said on X.

As a journalist, Villavicencio uncovered a corruption scheme for which former president Correa (2007-2017) was sentenced to eight years in prison. Villavicencio later served as president of the legislative oversight commission, where he continued to

denounce corruption. The politician had complained this month that he and his team were receiving threats allegedly coming from the leader of a criminal gang linked to drug trafficking.

"Despite the new threats, we will continue fighting for the brave people of our #Ecuador," he posted on X at the time. Atamaint, head of the electoral council, also said that several members of her organization, which is responsible for supervising the ballot, had received death threats. President Lasso sent a message to Villavicencio's family. "My solidarity and my condolences with his wife and his daughters," he said in his post. — AFP

Opposition MPs walk out of Modi's speech

NEW DELHI: Dozens of opposition MPs walked out of India's parliament on Thursday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was defending his record at the climax of a three-day no-confidence debate, prompting a furious rebuke from the premier. Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, who on Wednesday said Modi's government was "set on burning the whole country", was among the walkouts, broadcasters said.

Modi denounced them, saying: "Those who don't trust democracy are always ready to make a comment but don't have the patience to hear (the rebuttal)." They would "speak ill and

run away, throw garbage and run away, spread lies and run away", he said, to cheers from his own benches. "This is their game and the country can't expect much from them."

The no-confidence motion was brought by the opposition over months of ethnic violence in Manipur state that has killed more than 150 people. But analysts see it as political maneuver ahead of a general election next year when Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is widely expected to win a third term in power. Its muscular appeals to India's Hindu majority have proven a winning formula and he has already steered the BJP to two landslide victories over Gandhi and his Congress party.

Gandhi, 53, is the son, grandson and great-grandson of three former Indian premiers. The 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. Gandhi spearheaded the parliamentary attack on the government Wednesday, condemning what he said was Modi's inaction over the Manipur violence.

Gandhi charged that Modi was "killing Mother India". The opposition leader was restored to parliament on Monday after the Supreme Court suspended his defamation conviction over comments criticizing Modi. Gandhi had been 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.

'Pain and anger'

Modi's party has been repeatedly accused by political opponents and rights groups of fomenting religious divisions for electoral purposes. At least 152 people have been killed in Manipur since May, according to gov-

ernment figures, after armed clashes broke 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. Tens of thousands of additional soldiers have been rushed from elsewhere to contain violence, and a curfew and internet shutdown remain in force across Manipur. Human Rights Watch has accused BJP-led state authorities in Manipur of facilitating the conflict with "divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism". Modi faced a barrage of criticism from opponents for taking more than two months to speak about the conflict. He broke his silence in July after the publication of a graphic video showing a baying mob parading two Kuki women naked, saying that the incident had filled his heart with "pain and anger". — AFP

Recent political assassinations

PARIS: Ecuador presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was shot dead Wednesday at an election rally in the nation's capital. Here is a look at other recent major political assassinations worldwide.

Shinzo Abe, 2022

In a drama that sent shock waves through a country with low gun crime, former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, who had resigned from his position in 2020 but remained a key political voice, was campaigning for his ruling party when a lone gunman killed him on July 8, 2022. Abe's accused killer targeted the former leader believing he had ties to the Unification Church, which he resented over massive donations his mother had made to the sect.

Jovenel Moise, 2021

Haitian president Jovenel Moise was shot dead in the middle of the night on July 7, 2021 in his private residence in Port-au-Prince by a band of 28 armed men. Three of the commandos were killed and around 20, including 18 former Colombian soldiers, were arrested. A US investigation revealed that two men at the head of a Miami security firm had devised a plan to kidnap Moise and replace him with a Haitian-American citizen.

Jo Cox, 2016

British Labour party politician Jo Cox was shot and stabbed to death by a far-right sympathizer on June 16, 2016 in the street a week before Britons voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. The 41-year-old was a prominent campaigner for refugee rights. It was first killing of a British politician in office since the 1990 assassination of Ian Gow by the Irish Republican Army.

Some high-profile attempts

In September 2022 a man pointed a gun at Argentina Vice President Cristina Kirchner from close range while she greeted supporters gathered outside her home in Buenos Aires, but the weapon failed to fire. In November the same year in Pakistan, former prime minister Imran Khan was hit by a spray of gunfire during a rally as his open-top truck made its way through a crowded street.

The government said the assassination bid was the work of a lone wolf, with police leaking a "confession" video by the junk-shop owner saying he acted because Khan was against Islam. In 2018 former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was stabbed in the abdomen during his successful presidential campaign by an attacker later deemed mentally unfit to stand trial. — AFP

Hezbollah member buried after clashes over munitions truck

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Hezbollah movement on Thursday buried one of its members who was killed a day earlier when a truck carrying ammunition belonging to the Iran-backed group overturned near Beirut, sparking clashes. Hundreds turned out for the funeral of Ahmad Ali Kassas in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold, an AFP photographer said, adding that heavy gunfire rang out during the procession.

The office of Lebanon's Defense Minister Maurice Slim said a bullet hit the minister's car as it passed through a district near the area, without harming him. Ruling out an assassination attempt, a military source and a security source told AFP on condition of anonymity that Slim's vehicle was hit by "a stray bullet" whose origin was unidentified.

Earlier Thursday, the Lebanese army said it seized munitions from a Hezbollah truck that had overturned in the town of Kahale near Beirut, leading to deadly clashes between Christian residents and members of the powerful Shiite Muslim group. The violence erupted on Wednesday evening after the accident in the town located in the mountains east of the Lebanese capital, on the road linking it to the Bekaa Valley bordering Syria.

Kahale mayor Abboud Abi Khalil told AFP that residents had surrounded the truck demanding to know what was inside, before Hezbollah members escorting it opened fire and killed one of them. Hezbollah said one of its members was shot and later died of his wounds. "A number of armed men... present in the area gathered and attacked" those escorting the truck, a Hezbollah statement said Wednesday.

"They began by throwing rocks, and then opened fire," the group added. Hezbollah supporters posted pictures on



BEIRUT: People chant slogans during the funeral of a fighter of the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah in Beirut's predominantly-Shiite Muslim southern suburb on August 10, 2023. — AFP

social media showing Kassas dressed in military fatigues in Syria, where Hezbollah has been fighting on the side of President Bashar al-Assad in the country's civil war that erupted in 2011. The army confirmed in a statement on Thursday that two people had been killed and said ammunition had been seized from the truck. "The cargo of the truck has been transported to a military centre, and an investigation has been opened by the competent judicial authorities," it added.

The army said its troops had removed the truck at

dawn and reopened the Beirut-Damascus road which Kahale residents had blocked in protest. Hezbollah is the only Lebanese faction that kept its weapons after the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. It is considered a "terrorist" organization by many Western governments.

In August 2021, angry residents of a mainly Druze village in southern Lebanon stopped a truck carrying a rocket launcher used by Hezbollah in an attack on Israel, accusing the Shiite movement of endangering civilian lives. — AFP

Kenyan cult leader to remain in police custody: Court

NAIROBI: A Kenyan court on Thursday extended the detention of a cult leader accused of inciting and possibly forcing more than 400 of his followers to starve themselves to death. Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie has been in police custody since mid-

April as investigators search for more bodies in a forest near the Indian Ocean coast.

Senior principal magistrate Yusuf Shikanda said at a court hearing in the port city of Mombasa that Mackenzie and 29 co-accused would be held for a further 47 days pending investigations. "The application by the state for extension of custodial orders is allowed... for a further period not exceeding 47 days from 2/8/2023," Shikanda said in a ruling seen by AFP.

The former taxi driver and founder of the Good News International Church is yet to enter a plea. State prosecutors say that

once the investigations are complete, the 30 defendants will be subjected to psychiatric assessments before being charged with terrorism and other offences. To date, 425 bodies have been discovered in the Shakahola forest, a 325-hectare (800-acre) bushland that lies inland from the Indian Ocean town of Malindi.

A fourth round of exhumations were suspended on July 19 to allow the ill-equipped morgue in Malindi to perform autopsies on 87 bodies. While starvation appears to be the main cause of death, some of the victims — including children — were strangled,

beaten or suffocated, according to autopsies carried by the government.

Regulating religion

Police say they have arrested a total of 37 people over what has been dubbed the "Shakahola Forest Massacre". Around 95 people have been rescued from the forest while 464 DNA samples have been collected from families looking for their lost relatives, according to police data.

Questions have been raised about how Mackenzie, a father of seven, managed to evade law enforcement despite a history of

extremism and previous legal cases. Mackenzie fell foul of the law in 2017 after he was accused of urging children not to attend school, claiming the Bible did not recognize education.

He was arrested again in March, after two children starved to death in the custody of their parents but was subsequently freed on bond. The horrific saga has drawn President William Ruto to weigh in on the sensitive subject of Kenya's homegrown religious movements — and failed efforts to regulate unscrupulous churches and cults that have dabbled in criminality. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2023

US investment policy 'severely disrupts' supply chains: China

Beijing vows to 'safeguard' its interests

BEIJING: Beijing on Thursday vowed to "safeguard" its interests against a new US policy to restrict investment in Chinese technology, accusing Washington of disrupting global supply chains. US President Joe Biden hours earlier announced an executive order directing the Treasury Department to restrict certain US investments in China in sensitive high-tech sectors including semiconductors, quantum computing and artificial intelligence.

China's foreign ministry blasted the move as an attempt to "engage in anti-globalization and de-sinicization", warning that China would "resolutely safeguard its own rights and interests". "Beijing is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposes the United States' insistence on introducing restrictions on investment in China, and has lodged solemn representations with the United States," an unnamed foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement published online.

Biden's executive order "seriously deviates from the market economy and fair competition principles the US has always promoted, and affects companies' normal operation decisions, damages the international trade order, and severely disrupts the security of global industrial and supply chains", the Chinese commerce ministry said in a separate statement. "China expresses serious concern about this and reserves the right to take measures," the commerce ministry said, without mentioning specific countermeasures.

The restrictions, which are expected to take effect next year, come as Biden's administration looks to bolster its position vis-a-vis China on a multitude of fronts: military, economic and technological. Chinese internet giants Alibaba, Baidu, ByteDance and Tencent have ordered \$5 billion worth of chips from California-based Nvidia vital to powering generative artificial intelligence systems as fears mount the US will begin restricting exports, according to a Financial Times report. — AFP



SHENYANG: This aerial photo shows people visiting a market in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

US consumer inflation edges up in July

WASHINGTON: US consumer inflation inched up in July, government data showed Thursday, rebounding slightly for the first time in around a year and weighing on policymakers as they mull further interest rate hikes. The consumer price index (CPI), a key inflation gauge, rose 3.2 percent from a year ago last month, according to the Labor Department — slightly up from June's 3.0 percent pace and breaking a streak of cooling figures. The latest CPI number remains moderate compared with last year's figures, as the Federal Reserve's rapid interest rate hikes bite. Last month, the Fed raised rates to the highest level since 2001.

But with the world's biggest economy showing signs of cooling, officials said they would remain data dependent when making further rate decisions — amid growing hope that their policy moves will lower inflation while avoiding a major recession.

"Today's report shows that our economy remains strong," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

"Annual inflation has fallen by around two thirds since last summer, and inflation outside of food and energy has fallen to its lowest level in any three-month period since September 2021," he added.

The CPI held steady in July on a month-on-month basis, rising the same pace as in June, according to Labor Department data. "The index for shelter was by far the largest contributor to the monthly all items increase, accounting for over 90 percent of the increase, with the index for motor vehicle insurance also contributing," the department said. Energy prices ticked up just 0.1 percent from June to July,

while food prices rose 0.2 percent. Excluding the volatile food and energy segments, "core" CPI rose 4.7 percent from a year ago — its slowest pace since October 2021.

Right direction

"While inflation is still far above target, and the annual change in headline CPI picked up in July, core prices are moving in the right direction," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics. Analysts had expected a slightly higher headline CPI reading as well, according to MarketWatch. Farooqi added that the July figures will be "welcome news to policymakers" who have a longer-term inflation target of two percent.

"The July CPI report offered more convincing evidence that inflation pressures are abating," said EY-Parthenon senior economist Lydia Boussour.

While rent prices picked up from the previous month, "we're clearly past peak inflation on the housing front," she added. Consumer inflation hit a high of 9.1 percent on an annual basis in June 2022, and has been cooling since then.

Hawkish bias

For now, the CPI report argues for Fed officials to hold interest rates steady at their next policy meeting in September, Boussour said. But with inflation still far from target, officials will "likely maintain a hawkish bias and keep the door open to further rate hikes if the data justifies it," she said.

Ryan Sweet, chief US economist at Oxford Economics, believes the central bank could be done hiking interest rates. "We expect the Fed to skip rate hikes in September and November, when inflation should have decelerated even further," he wrote in a note.

But the US central bank is unlikely to cut rates until early next year to ensure that it wins the inflation battle, said Sweet. — AFP

India's CB holds rates as food prices soar

MUMBAI: India's central bank left interest rates unchanged Thursday but warned that higher food prices, caused in part by extreme weather, had impacted household budgets and halted a downward inflation trend. The benchmark repurchase rate has been kept at 6.50 percent since the last hike by the Reserve Bank of India in February. Consumer prices were "expected to surge during July (and) August led by vegetable prices", governor Shaktikanta Das said in a webcast. "While the vegetable price shock may reverse quickly, possible El Nino weather conditions along with global food prices need to be watched closely against the backdrop of a skewed southwest monsoon so far," he added.



MUMBAI: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das (center) poses before addressing a press conference in Mumbai on August 10, 2023. — AFP

Inflation edged up to 4.81 percent in June after falling to 4.31 percent in May. It peaked at 7.79 percent in April last year. The bank's decision was in line with analyst expectations. Economists warn inflation in the short term could again breach the RBI's upper tolerance band of 6.0 percent because of rising prices for crude oil and food, including tomatoes — a staple in Indian cuisine.

Tomato prices have soared in recent months after inclement weather and pest attacks in major production belts, the RBI noted in July. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament on Thursday that the government was taking "lots of steps...to contain high prices which are hitting common citizens". Sitharaman said the government was importing pulses and had removed import restrictions to source tomatoes from neighboring Nepal to ease the domestic inflation pressure.

The government is already selling subsidized tomatoes across the country and the prices in wholesale markets "are falling and we expect this to help us", she said. "I want to highlight the fact that, on these essential commodities, we are taking enough steps — but more will also be taken, because we are conscious that people need essentials at an affordable price," Sitharaman added. India imports more than 80 percent of its crude oil, making the world's most populous nation vulnerable to skyrocketing prices driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP



BEVERLY HILLS: The Michael Kors store in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

Tapestry to buy Michael Kors' parent company

NEW YORK: Tapestry, the US owner of lifestyle brands including Coach and Kate Spade, said Thursday it will acquire Michael Kors parent company Capri for \$8.5 billion, creating a new global fashion giant to compete with European powerhouses. The unified company will also include Tapestry's Stuart Weitzman and Capri's Jimmy Choo — both shoe powerhouses — as well as Versace, a go-to brand for Hollywood A-listers looking to make a splash on red carpets. That will give Tapestry multiple brands marketed around shoes and handbags, as well as a strengthened apparel offering with Versace and Kors, also a celeb favorite.

The merger "creates a new powerful global luxury house," said Tapestry chief executive Joanne Crevoiserat. The all-cash takeover aims to boost sales across an upscale portfolio by combining customer data streams, broadening geographic reach and achieving some \$200 million in annual cost savings within three years of the deal closing, a joint press release said. "We've created a dynamic, data-driven consumer engagement platform that has fueled our success," Crevoiserat said. "From this position of strength, we are ready to leverage our competitive advantages across a broader portfolio of brands."

'Patchwork of brands'

Neil Saunders, managing director of consultancy GlobalData, said the transaction aims to enable Tapestry to benefit from a similar strategy to that employed by European powerhouses like LVMH based around "a patchwork of brands appealing to different segments, rather than by making individual brands ubiquitous."

While "there is a lot of logic behind the deal," Saunders called Capri's price "hefty" and described the state of the Michael Kors brand as a declining "mess." "Admittedly, Tapestry has plenty of experience of reviving problem brands from its turnaround of Coach, which had become ubiquitous and sullied through constant discounting and promotions," Saunders said. — AFP



NEW YORK: Customers arrive for the re-opening of the Century 21 flagship department store in New York City on May 16, 2023. — AFP

Business

Biden targets China as he touts manufacturing revival at home

President seeks to restrict US investment in Chinese technology

BELEN, US: President Joe Biden on Wednesday moved to restrict US investment in Chinese technology during a multi-state tour of the Southwest to tout his push to revive American manufacturing after decades of decline.

The executive order directs the Treasury Department to restrict certain US investments in China in sensitive high-tech sectors including semiconductors, quantum computing and artificial intelligence

groundbreaking of a factory manufacturing wind turbine towers for the Arcosa group—and the creation of 250 new jobs.

“Where’s it written that America can’t lead the world again in manufacturing? Because we’re going to do just that,” he added. Biden, who is running for a second term, praised the project, which converts a facility that had been making disposable tableware and other plastic products until the operation went

year ago: the CHIPS and Science Act, which pumps huge funding into semiconductor manufacturing, research and development; and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a landmark law for megaprojects boosting green investment. The laws follow the same formula: pour in subsidies and offer tax incentives to encourage domestic production and development of both electric cars and future semiconductors.

The administration’s policy of unshamed industrial sovereignty is making some of Washington’s traditional allies bristle. But Biden, focused on domestic priorities, has waived them off.

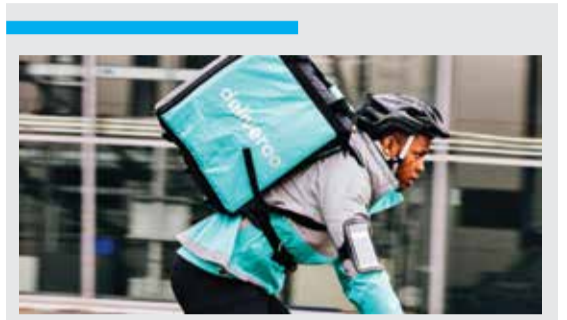
He needs to win back portions of the working-class vote captured by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump, who appealed to large segments of blue-collar workers who were laid off or otherwise felt left behind by globalization.

Hundreds of billions

The White House claims that since Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act—so named because a post-pandemic America was buckling in the face of soaring prices—companies have made some \$110 billion in clean energy investments in the United States. And CHIPS has led to companies pouring more than \$166 billion into manufacturing of semiconductors and other electronics, the Biden administration added. Chinese internet giants Alibaba, Baidu, ByteDance and Tencent have ordered \$5 billion worth of Nvidia chips vital to powering generative artificial intelligence systems as fears mount the US will begin restricting exports, according to a Financial Times report.

The report quoted an unnamed Baidu employee as saying “Without these Nvidia chips, we can’t pursue the training for any large language model.” In total, more than half a trillion dollars of investment has flowed into manufacturing and clean energy since the start of the Biden administration in January 2021, Biden said Wednesday. Such astronomical figures, however, do not automatically boost his election advantage. The Democrat, handicapped by his age in the eyes of voters, knows his reelection destiny will be played out as much in the courts as in America’s factories. While keen to talk up his economic policies, the US president has remained stubbornly silent on the legal perils of Trump, the clear frontrunner in the Republican Party’s 2024 nomination race.

Polls, which admittedly carry little sway 15 months before the election, so far show the two rivals neck and neck, despite mounting indictments against the Republican billionaire. —AFP

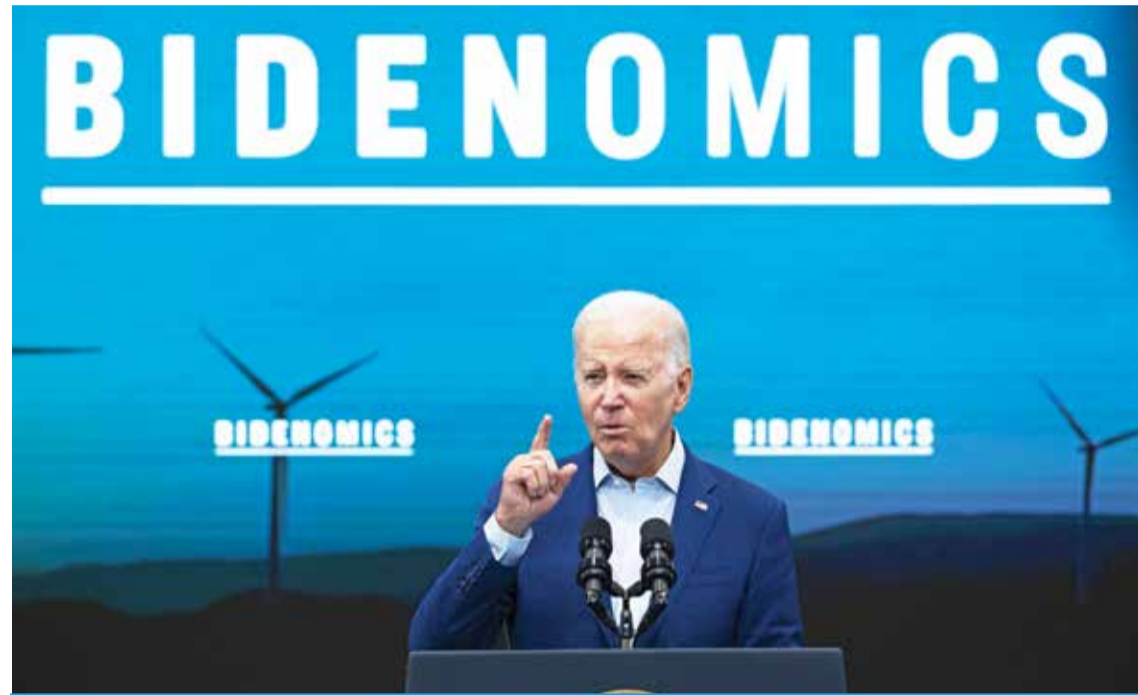


Food delivery app Deliveroo halves losses

LONDON: Deliveroo, the international food delivery app, reported on Thursday that net losses almost halved in the first six months of the year on cost-cutting and higher revenues. Losses after tax dropped 46 percent to £83 million (\$106 million) compared with the first half of last year, the London-headquartered group said in a statement. Revenue grew five percent to £1 billion as inflated food prices offset falling orders amid a cost-of-living crisis and controversy over treatment of riders. “We have delivered a strong financial performance despite challenging macroeconomic conditions,” said chief executive Will Shu, who founded the company a decade ago.

Deliveroo said it would return £250 million to investors, helping its share price to rise more than three percent in early London trading. It earlier this year cut about 350 jobs, or nearly one-tenth of its non-rider workforce. The group, which experienced surging demand during the COVID pandemic from lockdown-hit customers, has tens of thousands of self-employed riders—a status that continues to cause controversy.

In June, the European Union backed plans that could force Deliveroo and other gig-economy companies like Uber to treat workers as employees, boosting their labor rights. “We continue to see strong rider application pipelines and rider retention rates,” Deliveroo said in Thursday’s earnings statement. “However, we have actively managed our rider fleet size by onboarding fewer new riders in the period to reflect the impact of macroeconomic conditions on order volumes.” —AFP



BELEN, US: US President Joe Biden speaks on how “Bidenomics” is helping clean energy and manufacturing, at Arcosa Wind Towers in Belen, New Mexico, on August 9, 2023. -- AFP

(AI). The restrictions, which are expected to take effect next year, come as Biden’s administration looks to bolster its position vis-a-vis China on a multitude of fronts: military, economic and technological.

They also come as the 80-year-old Democrat revs up his pitch for reelection in 2024, turning his attention to jobs and the economy, key bread-and-butter issues in the campaign for the White House.

As the executive order was made public, Biden was speaking in New Mexico about his government’s success in boosting manufacturing jobs in the renewable energy sector—an appeal to voters to embrace his brand of “Bidenomics.” “Our plan is working,” he said in the city of Belen to mark the

bankrupt. “When I think climate, I think jobs,” Biden told the audience in Belen, one day after a stopover at the Grand Canyon that focused on the environment. “Instead of exporting American jobs, we’re creating American jobs and we’re exporting American products,” he added.

‘Bidenomics’

For many, the Democrat’s economic policies—the “Bidenomics” that the president’s communications team is trying to bring into the mainstream in a positive light—remain murky. Biden is struggling to bring Americans up to speed on two major bills he shepherded through Congress and signed into law one

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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 10 AUGUST 2023

(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	959	930	960	930	30	17,925,561	-22	-2.31%	-9.42%	916	940	14.2	1.80	3.6%	1.02
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	258	257	262	256	6	25,708,048	0	0.00%	-14.06%	256	261	12.8	1.19	3.7%	1.31
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	165	164	166	163	3	9,716,113	-1	-0.61%	-8.45%	164	167	20.3	0.55	2.2%	1.13
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	200	200	205	198	7	1,675,586	1	0.50%	-4.11%	197	202	20.3	0.77	3.8%	1.30
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	770	765	781	765	16	38,564,150	-5	-0.65%	2.25%	762	784	20.1	1.97	2.2%	1.16
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	626	624	641	620	21	21,509,954	-1	-0.16%	-17.11%	618	642	41.8	2.59	0.9%	1.22
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	135	139	145	133	12	6,889,489	4	2.96%	-8.55%	133	141	9.9	0.64	3.6%	1.83
204	National Investments	Financial Services	238	235	243	232	11	8,040,846	-4	-1.67%	-0.84%	232	237	-	1.00	11.6%	2.00
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	126	123	127	123	4	19,203,318	-2	-1.60%	9.82%	122	126	22.2	0.75	0.0%	0.99
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	142	155	157	142	15	87,793,118	13	9.15%	37.48%	150	157	14.6	1.11	2.6%	1.21
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	160	163	164	158	6	39,569,210	3	1.88%	22.56%	158	163	11.0	1.20	4.7%	1.70
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	68.5	67.3	69	66.4	2.4	3,343,835	-1.4	-2.04%	-10.15%	67.3	69.1	-	0.42	13.6%	1.30
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	149	169	170	149	21	68,224,577	20	13.42%	61.18%	158	170	15.4	1.16	1.8%	1.12
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	878	838	878	837	41	1,635,265	-27	-3.12%	4.75%	838	856	17.7	1.92	1.6%	1.08
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	107	106	107	104	3	11,195,758	0	0.00%	10.39%	105	108	17.2	0.65	2.7%	0.59
501	National Industries	Financial Services	234	229	238	226	12	19,169,168	-5	-2.14%	10.81%	226	231	-	1.06	2.1%	1.60
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,201	1,200	1,230	1,198	32	328,552	-28	-2.28%	-1.23%	1,171	1,202	13.3	1.14	4.9%	1.07
506	HEISCO	Industrials	699	698	699	680	19	309,073	4	0.58%	13.87%	668	700	24.0	1.74	2.9%	0.96
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	722	707	722	705	17	3,265,119	-12	-1.67%	-11.63%	705	722	10.7	1.37	8.4%	0.93
603	Agility	Industrials	630	631	643	630	13	9,498,912	3	0.48%	-12.36%	618	656	23.0	0.89	0.0%	1.52
605	Zain	Telecommunications	518	515	523	515	8	13,272,226	-3	-0.58%	-8.53%	512	528	11.0	1.74	6.8%	0.65
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,395	3,351	3,496	3,300	196	920,130	29	0.87%	-0.04%	3,350	3,400	9.3	2.99	11.2%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	182	176	182	174	8	5,575,609	-3	-1.68%	-13.30%	171	178	-	0.76	0.0%	1.16
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,975	1,913	2,020	1,881	139	2,345,745	-86	-4.30%	0.68%	1,910	1,958	23.2	15.71	4.0%	1.43
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	82.3	86.1	87	81.4	5.4	68,900,814	3.6	4.36%	13.29%	84.0	86	9.7	0.97	5.8%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	208	200	208	200	8	60,943,658	-7	-3.38%	-12.34%	200	207	28.4	1.09	1.4%	1.13
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	526	480	529	480	49	3,680,504	-45	-8.57%	22.14%	467	490	72.9	1.46	2.4%	0.47
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	398	404	415	385	30	3,904,725	9	2.28%	9.19%	400	408	37.0	1.57	3.8%	0.73
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	188	194	198	188	10	1,946,011	0	0.00%	3.19%	193	198	16.0	1.96	8.7%	0.46
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,928	1,912	2,000	1,901	99	935,500	-13	-0.68%	-6.82%	1,900	1,971	23.2	7.50	4.3%	0.96
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,189	1,240	1,287	1,178	109	3,686,328	70	5.98%	54.04%	1,220	1,267	16.0	4.91	5.5%	0.22

* As of end of week closing

Business

Russian CB halts currency purchases as ruble tumbles

'Unsettled' Moscow residents tighten belts as ruble tanks

MOSCOW: The Russian central bank said it would no longer purchase foreign currency on the domestic market from Thursday, as it sought to prop up the ruble, at its lowest level against the dollar since March 2022.

"The Bank of Russia has decided that, from 10 August through 31 December 2023, it will not buy foreign currency in the domestic market," the central bank said in a statement late Wednesday. "This decision is aimed at reducing volatility in financial markets," it said.

With the announcement, the bank is setting aside its budget rule, under which Russia buys or sells foreign currency stored in its National Wealth Fund to compensate for fluctuations in revenues from oil and gas exports.

The move comes after the ruble fell sharply in recent weeks, prompting fears among many Russians that their standard of living could take a hit. On Thursday morning, Russia's currency was trading at 107 rubles to the euro and 97 rubles to the dollar, its lowest levels since the early days of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

The central bank had restarted purchases of foreign exchange under the budget rule in January, after a pause of almost 10 months that saw Russia hit with a raft of Western sanctions in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Until the start of the offensive in February 2022, Russia used mainly euros and dollars to balance its budget.

But Moscow has sought to reduce its dependence on the dollar to limit Washington's influence, turning instead to the Chinese yuan when foreign exchange pur-

chases restarted this year.

"The Bank of Russia will make a decision on resuming fiscal rule-based foreign currency purchases in the domestic market depending on the actual situation in financial markets," the bank said.

In central Moscow, retired businessman Igor Inkin is preparing to turn down simple pleasures like dessert as the value of the ruble in his pocket continues to slide. At 63 years old, he has seen the highs and lows of Russia's turbulent economy, but 17 months into the Kremlin's Ukraine offensive, Inkin is concerned about how to make ends meet.

The ruble has been trading around 97 against the dollar in recent days — its lowest level since March 2022, weeks after Moscow unleashed full-scale hostilities in Ukraine.

"Prices in the shops are going up and we're having to adjust our expenditures. It's very unsettling," Inkin told AFP. "We are denying ourselves many, many things... sweets and so on."

Coupled with a year and a half of unprecedented Western sanctions and a sharp drop in oil revenues, Russians are starting to feel the pinch.

Inflation has been on the rise since spring, forcing the central bank to hike its key rate to a greater-than-expected 8.5 percent to rein in prices. "The situation with the ruble is especially worrying for us pensioners," Inkin said.

'Prices have gone up'

For young Russians, who now face the kind of isolation their Soviet peers remember, the outlook is bleak. President Vladimir

Putin insists Moscow will weather the storm, presenting it as a historic opportunity to bolster Russia's domestic businesses and create jobs for the country's youth.

Many Muscovites echoed Putin's hope that isolation from the West would lead to a renaissance for Russian-made companies and businesses. But, far from what is shown on Kremlin-controlled television screens, many are struggling. Dmitry Bobrov, a 19-year-old freelance IT fixer and bicycle courier, cannot always afford spare computer parts.

"Video cards, processors... after the ruble fell their prices have gone up a lot," he said, weighed down by a large courier bag. Western sanctions have made it harder for Russian businesses to buy goods and parts from abroad, forcing them to rely on parallel imports — goods transported via another country.

The United Kingdom on Tuesday introduced new sanctions targeting Russia's access to military equipment, adding to a long list of restrictions designed to isolate the country. "The special military operation is also having a big impact, I think," Bobrov said, using the Kremlin term for its offensive in Ukraine. Around him, billboards of Western brands have largely disappeared, replaced by huge portraits of Russian soldiers.

'This cannot go on forever'

While many Russians appear publicly stoic and receptive to the Kremlin's narrative, data show they are increasingly worried about their livelihoods. Fearing for their savings, Russians withdrew one billion rubles in cash (\$10.3 million) in the



MOSCOW: This photograph taken on July 6, 2022 shows a Russian ruble coin and US dollar banknotes in Moscow. — AFP

three days after the Wagner mercenary group staged a mutiny, according to central bank figures. The number is some five times higher than the average of a normal three-day period in Russia.

Sofya Donets, chief economist for Russia at Renaissance Capital, said the weakening of the ruble presented no risk to the country's financial stability.

Analyst Arnaud Dubien meanwhile said the drop in the ruble was expected, reflecting the country's foreign trade. What is not expected, he said, is that "the ruble is weakening even as the price of oil increases again." The Russian economy re-

lies heavily on oil and gas exports.

He warned that the government must be careful not to let the ruble slip past 100 dollars to 1 ruble.

"This could fuel speculation in society that the country has fallen by the wayside," he added. Fyodor Tikhonov, a 37-year-old working in the film industry, said putting food on the table for his family has become far pricier. He used to be able to buy dinner in the supermarket for around 1,000 rubles (\$10). "Now, it's minimum 2,000," the video editor said as he took his son to the shop. "This cannot go on forever," he said. — AFP

Cubans wary of banks as govt cracks down on cash

HAVANA: Accustomed to lugging around thick wads of cash, Cubans are skeptical of government efforts to force them to deposit their money into a crumbling banking system, in an effort to curb runaway inflation and boost liquidity. The communist country is experiencing its worst economic crisis in decades, with double-digit inflation and rampant money printing in recent years boosting the amount of cash on the street.

Long wary of the country's poorly functioning banks, Cubans have in recent months embraced cash even more, to avoid long lines and withdrawal limits at ATMs. The government, seeking liquidity, transparency, and greater control over monetary flow, last week announced restrictions on cash payments to force businesses and citizens to use electronic payments.

Cash transactions will be limited to 5,000 pesos (about \$20 on the black market), under the reform which is to be gradually implemented over the next six months.

"In the times we are living in, 5,000 pesos is nothing," said mechanical engineer Lisandra Pupo, 30, who like most Cubans, prefers to have her cash safely in hand. Soaring prices and the loss of value of banknotes mean people on the island have to cram cash into a bag or backpack to pay even minor purchases.

"If I had a lot of money, I would not put it in the bank, because if I need it tomorrow and I go to the bank, they will not be able to give it to me, so I will have to wait three days, or until the bank has enough money," said Pupo. Independent economist Omar Everleny Perez said that "with such high prices and the inexistence of high denomination banknotes" the push toward banking is essential.

Outdated banking tech

However, Cuba's outdated banking system risks leaving users with no way of accessing their money at all. Internet is unreliable, many people don't have smartphones for contactless payments, and Central Bank president Joaquin Alonso on Monday admitted there were few terminals for card payments.

"To install point-of-sale terminals, a communication line is required... now imagine how much investment we would need to put terminals in all points of sale," said Alonso.

"This demands a lot of us, but we are not saying we won't move forward." Today there is a significant level of cash that is outside the banking system. That money does not circulate through the logical paths of the economy and is only traded between people," said Alonso. He said the mass of freely circulating cash was "incentivizing the inflationary spiral."

Complex economic crisis

The island nation's current economic crisis is multi-pronged, and comes with a backdrop of decades of US sanctions, inefficiency, lack of foreign investment, and a heavy reliance on imports.

Former US President Donald Trump toughened sanctions against Cuba, and then the COVID pandemic battered the tourism industry — the government's main source of foreign exchange — which has battled to recover. In 2021, a monetary reform phasing out a convertible peso pegged to the dollar, led the regular peso's value to plummet. — AFP

Philippines GDP slows as inflation, rate hikes weigh

MANILA: Philippine economic growth slowed sharply in the second quarter, official data showed Thursday, as high inflation, a drop in government spending and interest rate hikes dampened activity. Gross domestic product expanded by 4.3 percent from a year ago, compared with 6.4 percent in the first three months, figures released by the Philippine Statistics Agency showed.

That was below the median analyst forecast of 6.0 percent and the slowest since 2011, excluding the years 2020 and 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic smashed the economy, Bloomberg said.

The government's economic management team said second-quarter growth was underpinned by increased tourism spending and commercial investment. But the pace was "tempered by high commodity prices, the lagged effects of interest rate hikes, the contraction in government spending, and slower global economic growth", they said in a statement.

Government spending fell by 7.1 percent from the same period last year when expenditure was inflated by national elections. The economy grew by 5.3 percent in the first half, the officials said.

That meant the country's GDP needed to expand by at least 6.6 percent in the second half to reach

Alibaba announces unexpected 14% increase in sales

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba announced an unexpected 14 percent on-year increase in quarterly sales on Thursday, following several difficult years and in spite of a broader economic slowdown.

Alibaba is a key player in China's expansive digital economy and the operator of a major online shopping platform. The Hangzhou-based group's performance is therefore considered a barometer of domestic consumption, which has flagged in recent months. China entered deflation Wednesday for the first time since 2021, the latest in a long string of indicators reflecting a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy. In the first quarter of its financial year starting on April 1, Alibaba's revenue amounted to 234.1 billion yuan (\$32.5 billion), higher than analyst forecasts. Alibaba's net profit was also up 51 percent on-year, reaching 34.3 billion yuan during the April-June period.

'Solid'

The latest financial results come as Alibaba embarks on the biggest restructuring in its history. An-

Australian gas giants look to avert strikes

SYDNEY: One of Australia's largest gas producers will launch a last-gasp bid Thursday to halt a looming workers' strike that has already unnerved global energy markets. Natural gas prices spiked across Europe on Wednesday after staff voted to down tools over working conditions at Woodside's offshore rigs



MANILA: Shoppers look at flowers at Dangwa Flower Market in Manila in this file photo.

the government's full-year growth target of 6-7 percent, they said. "Notwithstanding the challenges, we believe this is still attainable," the officials said. "The improving outlook for inflation bodes well for the easing of interest rates and should pave the way for the expansion of activities of businesses, households, and the rest of the private sector."

But Capital Economics senior Asia economist Ga-

nounced in late March, the plan involves splitting the group into six distinct entities that will be able to separately pursue funding through public listings. "Alibaba delivered a solid quarter as we continue to execute our Reorganization, which is beginning to unleash new energy across our businesses," CEO Daniel Zhang said in a statement. Zhang, a key figure in the company's early development, is on his way out as CEO, but will remain with the group to lead its lucrative cloud computing branch, on which Alibaba is betting heavily. The personnel change will take effect on September 10. Zhang has been at the helm of the Alibaba empire since the 2019 departure of founder Jack Ma. In addition to cloud computing and e-commerce, the group is a heavyweight in the broader Chinese tech ecosystem, with major operations across logistics, media, entertainment and artificial intelligence.

Regulatory crackdown

The company's restructuring comes after a long rough patch for the country's tech industry, with authorities seeking to assert control over a leading sector that had once enjoyed lax regulation. In 2020, Alibaba became the country's first tech giant to bear the brunt of increased oversight, when authorities called off what would have become one of the most valuable public listings in history — valued at \$34 billion — for its former subsidiary Ant Group. Ant Group is the owner of Alipay, a mobile payment application that is widely used in China. One month after officials hit the brakes on its IPO, Alibaba was investigated for alleged

in Western Australia, which pumps out more than 10 percent of the world's LNG exports each month. Although Europe has largely replenished gas stockpiles disrupted by the war in Ukraine, there are fears that shortages and strong demand in Asia could rapidly put the squeeze on supplies.

Woodside said it was hopeful of averting the strike but had contingency plans in place to secure gas supplies in the face of disruption. "We hope that activating these plans will not be necessary," the company said in a statement. Woodside will return to the bargaining table on Thursday in an attempt to stop the strike, which could kick off as early as next week.

Staff on natural gas platforms owned by energy

anti-competitive practices, then issued a heavy fine of \$2.8 billion. And last month, authorities fined Ant Group 7.1 billion yuan for breaching banking regulations.

Alibaba competitor Tencent, also a core provider of payment services in China through its WeChat mobile app, was fined nearly 3 billion yuan. The crackdown now appears to be waning as Chinese officials voice renewed support for the digital economy, an important source of growth and potential jobs at a time when the broader economy is under pressure. But the sector has not yet regained its former dynamism. A sign of persisting challenges, Alibaba has shed more than 17,000 employees in the past year, according to a comparison of its workforce with the same quarter of 2022. — AFP



BEIJING: A man walks past an Alibaba sign outside the company's office in Beijing on April 13, 2021. — AFP

giant Chevron in Western Australia have also told the country's industrial regulator they are considering walking off the job.

The Australian Workers Union — which represents staff at Woodside and Chevron — said "hundreds of millions of dollars" in gas exports were at risk. "It's in everyone's best interest to get back to what our members know best, exporting quality Australian gas to the world," spokesman Brad Gandy said in a statement. If the talks break down, the union will need to give Australia's industrial regulator seven days' notice before stopping work. The union has threatened strike action as it seeks to secure a better deal for staff working in hazardous conditions on offshore platforms. — AFP

Lifestyle



The Emmy Trophy, in Los Angeles, California, September 16, 2021. — AFP

Emmys postponed until January over Hollywood strikes

The Emmy Awards have been postponed by almost four months, organizers said Thursday, as crippling strikes by Hollywood's actors and writers drag on with no resolution in sight. Television's equivalent of the Oscars had been due to take place this September, but will now be held in mid-January next year, broadcaster Fox and the Television Academy wrote in a statement. "We are pleased to announce that the 75th Emmy Awards will now air on Monday, January 15, 2024," said a Fox spokesman.

The Emmys are the most significant entertainment event so far to be delayed by Hollywood's first industry-wide walkout by both actors and writers in more than 60 years. The last time the Emmys were delayed was in 2001, when the ceremony was postponed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Due to the ongoing actors' strike, A-list stars and nominees would not currently be allowed to attend the Emmys — a development that would be disastrous for television ratings. Writers would also not be allowed to script a monologue or jokes for the telecast's host and presenters.

The lengthy delay is intended to allow both sides time to resolve their differences, although the various parties have barely spoken through any formal channels since the writers' strike began 100 days ago. Writers Guild of America (WGA) members were joined on the picket lines last month by the far larger Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA).

Both are asking for better pay, and guarantees that artificial intelligence will not steal their jobs and income, among other demands. Reports of an Emmys delay had been circulating in recent weeks, but until now the postponement had not been confirmed, nor any new date announced.

Mid-January lands the Emmys right in the middle of Hollywood's packed

film awards season. The Emmys will now take place one week after the Golden Globes, and just 24 hours after the Critics Choice Awards. The Oscars are set to be held on March 10.

Deadlock

The Hollywood strikes have essentially shut down all US movie and television productions, with limited exceptions such as reality and game shows. Members of SAG-AFTRA and the WGA are barred from promoting their movies and series. The unions' demands have focused on dwindling pay in the streaming era, and the threat posed to their careers and future livelihoods by artificial intelligence.

Writers and actors say studios have been methodically eroding their salaries for years, making it impossible for all but the very top ranks to earn a living. They contend that the rise of streaming platforms — who do not generally reveal viewing figures — has deprived them of giant paydays when they create global hits.

Writers and studios tentatively gathered last Friday to discuss formally reopening talks for the first time since May, but even that sitdown so far has not yielded any tangible results. Meanwhile, nominations for the 75th Primetime Emmy Awards were announced last month, just hours before talks between studios and SAG-AFTRA collapsed.

"Succession," the HBO drama about an ultra-wealthy family fighting for control of a sinister media empire, led the nominations with a whopping 27 nods, including best drama. "The Last of Us" became the first live-action video game adaptation to earn major nominations, with 24, while satire "The White Lotus" earned 23 nods. — AFP

Hollywood writers slam 'milestone of shame' as strike hits 100 days

Hollywood writers marked the 100th day of their industry-crippling strike Wednesday, dubbing the occasion a "milestone of shame" for studios as the two sides remain deadlocked. Film and television writers walked out back in May over demands for better pay and residuals, guarantees over the future use of artificial intelligence, and other working conditions. The Writers Guild of America strike swiftly brought countless film shoots and productions to a halt, costing the industry millions of dollars each day, but the two sides have barely spoken since.

The chaos wrought on the entertainment industry only deepened last month, when writers were joined on the picket lines by the far larger Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), who share similar demands. "The refusal to take writers' reasonable proposals seriously has caused the WGA strike to last 100 days and counting; it serves only as a milestone of shame" for the studios, the WGA told AFP Wednesday.

The studios "are wholly responsible for the over three-month shutdown of the industry and the pain it has caused workers and all others whose livelihoods depend on this business," said a statement. It added: "The cost of settling the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes is far less than the damage their intractability has caused."

Coincidentally, the last WGA strike, in 2007-08, was resolved after exactly 100 days. That stoppage cost \$2.1 billion to the California economy, according to one estimate by the Milken Institute. This time, there is no apparent end in sight. Writers and studios tentatively met last Friday to discuss formally reopening talks for the first time since May, but the sitdown has not yielded any tangible results.

Hours before they even met, a WGA

missive to members expressed skepticism about the studios' good faith. The studios hit back with a terse statement calling the writers' rhetoric "unfortunate." "This strike has hurt thousands of people in this industry, and we take that very seriously. Our only playbook

On the picket line outside Netflix's offices Wednesday, screenwriter Charlie Kesslering said the strike is an "existential fight." "This is about the careers that we love so much remaining careers, and remaining viable as a way to make a living — especially in an



US actress Thora Birch and her husband director Michael Benton Adler join members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) as they walk the picket line on the 100th day of strike outside of Fox Studios in Los Angeles.

is getting people back to work," said the studios.

But the writers say studios have been methodically eroding their salaries for years, making it impossible for all but the very top ranks to earn a living. They contend that the rise of streaming platforms — who do not generally reveal viewing figures — has deprived them of giant paydays when they create global hits.

expensive city like Los Angeles, where you have to live if you want a career in this business," he told AFP. "It's going to take a lot more than 100 days for the motivation to go away." In its statement, the WGA warned: "Ultimately, the studios have no choice but to make a fair deal." "Until then, we remain resolved and united." — AFP



Members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild walk the picket line outside of Netflix in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

Philippine director puts women at the 'heart' of drug war film

Widows and mothers are at the "heart" of a gritty documentary by Philippine filmmaker Sheryl Rose Andes, who turns the camera on women left behind by former president Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drug war. More than 6,000 people were killed in police anti-drug raids during Duterte's six-year term, which ended in June 2022, government data shows. Rights groups estimate the real figure was in the tens of thousands, mostly poor men living in slums who died at the hands of law enforcers, hitmen and vigilantes.

Many of the victims had wives or partners and mothers, who have had to deal with the heartbreak and hardship of losing a loved one and often the family's main breadwinner. In her new documentary "Maria", Andes follows two of these women, Mary Ann Domingo and Maria Deparine, as they struggle to survive and find justice.

"We have to register that this thing really happened. And now people need to see what has happened to their families," Andes told AFP in an interview. Andes said she was inspired to make the film out of fear that Filipinos could forget, or never learn, about the brutal period in their nation's history.

She got a "huge wake-up call" when one of her students in a filmmaking course she teaches at Mapua University in Manila expressed surprise that the drug war was "really happening". That moment in 2020 - four years into Duterte's drug war, which made headlines around the world and sparked an international investigation into alleged human rights abuses - left her aghast.

Three years later, "Maria" is the first full-length documentary to compete in the country's independent film festival Cinemalaya, which opened August 4. "Maria" — a common name for women in the Catholic-majority Philippines — focuses on the harrowing experiences of Domingo and Deparine, which Andes says gives the film "heart and emotion".

The documentary shows the women doing menial jobs to support their families and making tearful visits to the tombs of their loved ones. "I zoomed in on the details because it should not just be about numbers," said Andes. "This is a story about women. I don't want this to be remembered as a drug war story."

'It is very difficult'

Deparine lost two of her sons within days of each other in September 2016. One was with a local drug dealer when they were abducted by unidentified men. They were both shot in the head and

her sons, Domingo's partner and teenage son were killed in a nighttime police raid while the family slept in their shanty home. Later, she and three of her surviving children had to flee for fear of their safety.

Lawyer Kristina Conti, who is helping Domingo seek justice for their deaths, said the four officers who allegedly shot dead her partner and son had been freed on bail and were back in uniform after serving short suspensions. That's despite the men facing a homicide trial. "As a mother who lost her partner, it is very difficult. At times I just wanted to give up,



This photo shows filmmaker Sheryl Rose Andes (center), director of the documentary "Maria" on women left behind by former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drug war, speaking with cast and crew members of the film during a discussion following the film's screening at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City. — AFP photos

their bodies dumped under a bridge. Six days later, a second son was arrested by police at the home of a drug-dealing couple. He was later found dead under another bridge. Since their deaths, Deparine, who works in a fish cannery and voted for Duterte in 2016, has moved multiple times with her husband and surviving son as they struggle to make enough money to pay the rent.

In the same month Deparine lost

and at times I actually did," Domingo, 49, told AFP in an interview. "This (film) is our chance to show to the world what happened to us."

'Political stand'

Catholic priest Flaviano Villanueva, who appears in "Maria", said widows, mothers and grandmothers endured "unimaginable" hardships to keep their remaining family members alive. Villan-



Sheryl Rose Andes talks during an interview with AFP in Manila.

ueva, who runs a support group for the families of the drug war's dead, said there was a "social stigma" that led to discrimination against those left behind.

Orphans were "bullied" at school and widows excluded from government assistance because "her husband got killed for being a drug addict", he told AFP. Another woman who features prominently in the film is former Philippines vice president Leni Robredo, a vocal critic of the drug war who is seen consoling Domingo and Deparine. Robredo ran in the 2022 presidential election but lost by a huge margin to the son and namesake of the country's late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who has continued the drug war.

Andes, who spent a decade working for a non-government organization before turning her hand to filmmaking, refuses to shy away from difficult subjects. She said documentaries were a "powerful tool" in retelling history, but she feared that Filipinos preferred "escapism" and were not prepared to face grim reality.

Despite Duterte stepping down more than a year ago and Marcos Jr vowing to take the drug war in a new direction, Andes said the killings "never stopped". "A documentary takes a political stand," she said. "We are not fiction and we are not here to titillate." — AFP



This photo shows Father Flaviano Villanueva gesturing during an interview with AFP at his office in Manila.



This photo shows Mary Ann Domingo talking during an interview with AFP in Manila.



This photo shows moviegoers waiting in line to watch "Maria".

Lifestyle



Kherson's Mykola Kulish theatre troupe perform their new show "You Can (Not) Stay" recounting life under Russian occupation in Ukraine's southern city.--AFP photos



Kherson's Mykola Kulish theatre troupe hold a Ukrainian flag as they salute the audience at the end of their new show "You Can (Not) Stay".



Kherson's Mykola Kulish theatre troupe member Yuliya Bunchuck performs their new show "You Can (Not) Stay".

On a stripped-down stage, a group of actors in T-shirts and jeans sat on chairs recounting life under the Russian occupation of Ukraine's southern city of Kherson. Behind them, a screen showed a video of Russian military trucks entering the city, a column of black smoke rising into the sky and Russian soldiers raising their national flag. In Ukraine, artists have turned to performance to process the trauma of Moscow's invasion and contribute to a cultural scene that is flourishing despite the war. For the troupe from Kherson's Mykola Kulish theatre, their experience under occupation inspired their new show, "(Im)possible to Stay", which is currently touring theatres in Ukraine.



Kherson's Mykola Kulish theatre troupe members embrace spectators at the end of their new show "You Can (Not) Stay".



Ukraine theatre stages actors' tales of Russian occupation

Kherson was seized by Moscow in the early stages of the war and stayed under Russian rule for eight months in 2022. During the show, the players described taking part in rallies against Russian occupation in the city's central square and their desperate attempts to escape after troops fired on protesters.

"Thank God, many Ukrainians, many Ukrainian cities, haven't lived through all this," the theatre's director, Oleksandr Knyga, said before a performance at Kyiv's Lesya Ukrainka Theatre. "But we want to tell them our

story." With Kherson now back under Ukrainian control, the theatre is open and running classes for children. But its actors are scattered around Ukraine and abroad, and plans to finish the tour in Kherson are only tentative, as the city continues to face regular Russian attacks.

'It's here'

"Words just can't express all that we experienced on our own skin," Sergiy Mykhailovskiy told AFP ahead of the show. He wanted Ukrainians living in

less affected regions to "understand that the war exists and it's here, so no one forgets", he added.

His monologue about trying to help an elderly former costume designer in the occupied city got a round of applause and shouts of "bravo" from the audience. On stage, there were just seven chairs and a megaphone. During the performance, the actors shouted slogans from the demonstrations in Kherson against the Russians: "Go home while you're still alive!", "Kherson is Ukraine!"

"Every Kherson resident felt that it just wasn't possible not to go" to the protests in March 2022, said actor Rimma Kirsanova. But later in the month, Russian forces began firing warning shots and throwing stun grenades.

While breaking up demonstrations, they even played sugary music from Soviet children's films—something reproduced in the theatre performance. "It was surreal," said Mykhailovskiy.

In video footage shown on stage, a demonstrator lay with his legs bleeding. It was after seeing this that he started

home, said Ruslan Vyshnyvetskiy onstage, because "going to rallies has become unsafe for life". The actors also described efforts to escape Kherson via numerous checkpoints, where they risked their lives simply by trying to pass. Mykhailovskiy told how he and his family had decided to leave in September, when Moscow announced a referendum on Kherson region joining Russia.

As a traffic stop on their way out, a Russian soldier put a pistol to his head. As one drunken fighter from the Donetsk separatist regime told him: "Everything is allowed here. It's lawlessness."

Checkpoint encounter

Vyshnyvetskiy and his partner, fellow actor Yevgeniya Kirsanova, made four failed attempts to leave Kherson. At one checkpoint, all was going well until a guard searched their phones and found a photo of them at a rally holding a sign saying "Kherson is Ukraine". "I wasn't scared of what they would do to us," Kirsanova said onstage. "I was only scared for our child."

But then the guard, a pro-Russian separatist from Ukraine, offered to let them return to Kherson unpunished—in exchange for bribes of 3,000 hryvnias (\$82) apiece. From the back seat, Kirsanova quietly cheered, but Vyshnyvetskiy said he felt powerless and humiliated. "Those bastards just wipe their feet on you."

Finally, on their fifth attempt, the couple managed to leave, after more than two months under occupation. The show received a standing ovation. A young woman from Kyiv, Nataliya, was one of several audience members moved to tears. "The show is just wonderful," she said. "It's very good that people are ready to talk about this. "You just don't want to believe that all this really happened."—AFP

Robbie Robertson of The Band dies at 80

Robbie Robertson, guitarist and main songwriter of the seminal rock group The Band, has died, his manager said in a statement. He was 80 years old. As the ringleader of the Canadian-American group, Robertson penned The Band's most iconic songs including "The Weight," "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" and "Up On Cripple Creek." His manager said in a statement Robertson was surrounded by family at the time of his death, which followed "a long illness."



Robbie Robertson attends the "Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and the Band" press conference during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival at TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.--AFP

Prior to his work and leadership with The Band, Robertson was a key collaborator with none other than Bob Dylan, touring with him and playing on the album "Blonde on Blonde." Born July 5, 1943 in Toronto, Canada with both Mohawk and Jewish roots, Robertson worked on traveling carnivals in his early teenage years, before joining, and starting a variety of bands.

"I've been playing guitar for so long I can't remember when I started," he told Rolling Stone magazine in 1968. "I guess I got into rock and roll like everybody else." He joined the backing band of Ronnie Hawkins, a rockabilly star, when he was just 16, where he eventually met fellow musicians Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel and Levon Helm.

The group formed a strong bond, and they became Dylan's backing band in the mid-1960s for his infamous first electric

tour. They also played with the icon on his much-bootlegged "basement tapes."

'The Last Waltz'

After several name changes, the musicians became known as The Band. Robertson's history-minded compositions were masterful yarns that evoked the wilds of America and the characters who colored them, and in particular focused on the American South. "The Weight" is a regular on all-time greatest songs lists. A folk tune with country and gospel elements as well as Biblical allusion, it's considered a classic of the American songbook.

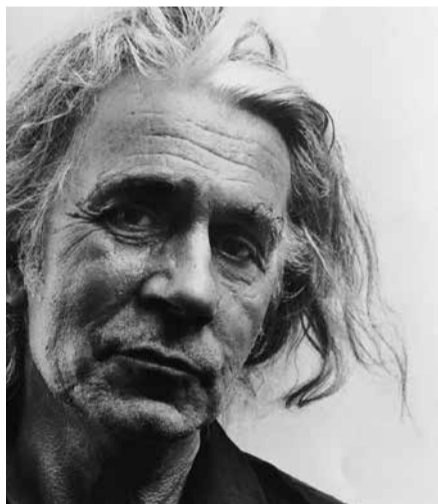
The group played Woodstock and cut a string of albums including "Music from Big Pink," "The Band" and "Cahoots." The Band split up in 1976 with a farewell concert in San Francisco, immortalized on film by director Martin Scorsese in "The Last Waltz."

The film, theatrically released in 1978, has become known as a critically acclaimed pioneering rock documentary. It also ushered in Robertson's longtime collaboration and friendship with Scorsese, who hired the guitarist as a musical supervisor on a string of his films including "Casino" and "Gangs of New York."

At the time of his death Robertson had been working on a follow-up to his memoir "Testimony," and had just completed scoring Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" which is set for release this fall.

Hailing his friend as "a giant," Scorsese called Robertson "a constant in my life and work." "Long before we ever met, his music played a central role in my life—me and millions and millions of other people all over this world. The Band's music, and Robbie's own later solo music, seemed to come from the deepest place at the heart of this continent, its traditions and tragedies and joys," Scorsese said in a statement.

"His effect on the art form was profound and lasting." Robertson didn't tour again after "The Last Waltz" but did release a string of solo albums starting in 1987, when he dropped "Robbie Robertson." He remained a beloved figure of American rock and folk, both for his guitar chops and his poetry. "I thought of a couple of words that led to a couple more," he told Rolling Stone in 1969, asked how he penned the classic "The Weight." "The next thing I know I wrote the song," Robertson continued.—AFP



British artist behind iconic Sex Pistols record covers dies

UK artist Jamie Reid, whose distinctive designs for the covers of several Sex Pistols records made them instant art classics, has died at the age of 76, his gallerist said on Wednesday. Announcing his death, John Marchant, a long-time collaborator who represents Reid's archive, told AFP he had left a "huge legacy."

His work, he said, had "entered the cultural landscape". One of Reid's best-known works was the 1977 single cover of "God Save the Queen". It used cut-outs of newspaper headlines to spell out the name of the group and the song's title across an image of Queen Elizabeth II, covering her eyes and mouth. Another, for the album "Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols", also released in 1977, used a similar technique on yellow and pink backgrounds.

"We sadly announce the passing of Jamie MacGregor Reid," a statement released by the John Marchant Gallery said, which noted he died on Tuesday. "Artist, iconoclast, anarchist, punk, hippie, rebel and romantic. Jamie leaves behind a beloved daughter Rowan a granddaughter Rose, and an enormous legacy," it added. Reid's works became emblematic of the punk movement and now grace the walls of some of the world's major art institutions including Tate Britain and New York's Museum of Modern art.—AFP

Piano great Argerich axes German, Swiss shows over illness

Celebrated Argentina-born pianist Martha Argerich has cancelled concerts in Germany and Switzerland in the coming days due to illness, organizers of the shows said Wednesday. The 82-year-old, considered one of the world's best pianists, is scheduled to play a series of shows with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra conducted by Argentinean-Zionist star Daniel Barenboim.

The Cologne Philharmonic said in a statement however that she will not be playing there on Saturday (August 12) while the Lucerne Festival said separately that she will be absent from the show planned on Tuesday, August 15.

In both cases, German pianist Igor Levit will take her place to perform Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major. The next outing on the tour, at the Salzburg Festival on August 17, appears to be maintained for now, according to the organizers' website.

No details were provided about Argerich's illness. Dubbed the "lioness" for her impressive long, grey mane, Argerich is also known as the "tigress of the keyboard" for her animal-like vitality.

Born on June 5, 1941 in Buenos Aires, she began playing the piano

at the age of three and gave her first concert with an orchestra aged eight. She moved to Europe with her family in 1955, learning from some of the continent's top pianists. At the age of 16, in the space of 10 days she won two major music competitions in Bolzano, Italy and in Geneva, later becoming a naturalized Swiss citizen.

A star, she was invited to concert halls around the world and started releasing now legendary recordings of concertos and other works by Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Prokofiev, Ravel, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven.

Her success was sealed when, in 1965, she won Poland's prestigious Chopin piano competition. For nearly two decades from the 1980s, Argerich largely shunned solo performances, saying they made her feel lonely, and playing almost exclusively with orchestras and chamber ensembles until a sold-out recital at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2000 in aid of a cancer charity. In remission from cancer herself, which she suffered in the 1990s, she cancelled for health reasons a series of concerts in 2017.—AFP



Argentine pianist Martha Argerich (center) and pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim (left) are pictured during a free concert at Plaza Vaticano square in Buenos Aires on July 29, 2017.--AFP

Lifestyle



Angry Birds maker Rovio's shareholders accept Sega's bid

Shareholders of Finland's Rovio, creator of the Angry Birds franchise, have overwhelmingly accepted Japanese Sega's offer to buy the company, allowing the deal to go through, the Finnish company said Thursday. Rovio said in a statement that 96.3 percent of its shareholders had accepted the offer, which values the company at more than 700 million euros (\$770 million). The offer was contingent on more than 90 percent acceptance.

"As the minimum acceptance condition and all other conditions to complete the offer have been fulfilled, the offeror will complete the offer in accordance with its terms and conditions," Rovio said. The deal marks the end of the independence of the Finnish mobile game industry, which burst onto the scene when Rovio launched its slingshot-bird game more than a decade ago.

The acquisition is part of Sega's "long-term goal" of expanding into the mobile gaming market, Sega CEO Haruki Satomi said when the deal was announced in April. Angry Birds swiftly became one of the most successful

mobile games ever after it was released in 2009, with a variety of birds flying through the air to crash into structures and take down armies of green pigs.

In 2016, the "Angry Birds" movie, produced by Sony Entertainment, was a massive success that grossed \$350 million worldwide. Rovio also manages Angry Birds theme parks in several countries and oversees the publication of children's books about the famous birds in a dozen languages.

But it has remained heavily reliant on its flagship game, struggling to develop another similar hit. The company, which employs over 500 people, reported a revenue of 317.7 million euros for 2022, with an adjusted net profit of 31.4 million euros. Sega, a major player in video games in the 1980s and 1990s, went into decline after it failed to compete against Japanese competitors Nintendo and Sony PlayStation. The deal is one of several recent high-profile acquisitions in the gaming sector, as companies fight it out for a slice of an industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars. —AFP

Hollywood's video game craze takes meta turn with 'Gran Turismo'

Ever since the huge successes of "The Super Mario Bros Movie," "Uncharted" and "The Last of Us," films and TV shows adapted from video games have been all the rage in Hollywood. But when Neill Blomkamp received a call from Sony asking if he wanted to direct a movie based around its super-serious, hyper-realistic racing game series "Gran Turismo," he was initially confused. "I almost wanted to read the screenplay just to understand what they were talking about, because it just made no sense to me," he told AFP. "Obviously, it's just a racing simulator." Indeed, the "Gran Turismo" games have no characters like Italian plumbers or fungus-crazed zombies who would lend themselves to a straightforward Hollywood film adaptation.

As a result, the movie's script—penned by the writer of "King Richard" and "Creed III"—took an entirely different and very meta approach. It is largely based instead on a marketing stunt, back in 2008, when Sony and Nissan launched a competition in which top "Gran Turismo" video gamers could test their skills on actual racetracks.

The GT Academy took PlayStation gamers out from their bedrooms, and put them behind real racecar wheels. Each year's champion was then given a chance to race against professional drivers on world-famous tracks including Silverstone and Le Mans. One of those, Jann Mardenborough—a working-class teen from Darlington, England, who was one of the first GT Academy gamers to successfully compete in real racing—is the subject of the movie. "I was so struck by this approach of it being a biography, but also being a video game film," said Blomkamp, who previously directed "District 9" and "Elysium." "And that the video game would be an element inside that real world—the way that 'Gran Turismo' exists in our world."

Emotional heft

Reviews for the movie have been mixed, with the Guardian dubbing it an "ode to product placement." But others praised the film's surprising emotional heft—not least its treatment of a fatal accident involving Mardenborough. At Germany's famous Nurburgring circuit in 2015, Mardenborough's car flipped vertically into the air and crashed through a fence, killing one spectator and injuring several more.

Mardenborough was cleared of any blame for the freak accident—although the movie suggests that racing purists who disliked his gamer background continued to whisper otherwise.

digital" technology. In part that was because the crash itself was so infamous and unusual, with the car going vertically airborne as it soared over a steeply undulating hill. "We tried to match what the car did, basically pixel perfect, from the video footage that we could find," said Blomkamp. Of course, using computer-generated visual effects (VFX) for that particular scene meant "there was no requirement for stunts at all."

Strikes and hype

Another obstacle for the movie has been Hollywood's ongoing strikes. The walkout, over actors' and writers' pay and other conditions, bars its stars such



Particularly with the real Mardenborough acting as stunt double for his own character in the film, the tragic incident had to be tackled with care. "You can't tell his story without having that in it. It's such an integral part of his journey," said Blomkamp.

But the crash is also "super sensitive for Jann," admitted Blomkamp. While the real Mardenborough performed other driving stunts throughout the movie, the decision was taken to recreate the fatal crash with "effectively 100 percent

as Orlando Bloom, David Harbor and Archie Madekwe from promoting the film at the usual swanky premieres and junkets. Sony took the unusual decision to delay the film's release in theaters, from this Friday to August 25, and offered early sneak previews to fans until then, in the hope of building word-of-mouth hype. "The stars can't promote the movie, but the audience can," said a Sony spokesperson. —AFP



These handout photographs taken and released by the Russian Space Agency Roscosmos a Soyuz 2.1b rocket with the Luna-25 lander is seen mounted on the launch pad ahead of its launch scheduled for August 11, 2023, at the Vostochny cosmodrome, some 180 km north of Blagoveshensk, in the Amur region. - Russia said on August 7, 2023 it plans to launch a lunar lander later this week after multiple delays, hoping to return to the Moon for the first time in nearly fifty years. --AFP photos

Russia's plan to launch its lunar lander on Friday is the latest in an international push to return to the Moon that includes the world's top powers but also new players. Technology, science and politics are all essential factors in the Moon race. Here is the latest:

China's great leap

China is pursuing plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030 and plans to build a base there. The world's second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space program in a push to catch up with the United States and Russia. China was the third country to put humans in orbit in 2003 and Tian-gong is the crown jewel of its space program, which has also landed rovers on Mars and the Moon. The unmanned Chang'e-4 rocket landed on the far side of the Moon in 2019, with another robot mission to the near side raising the Chinese flag there in 2020. That moonshot brought rock and soil samples back to Earth, the first time that has been done in more than four decades.

NASA's Artemis

NASA's Artemis 3 mission is set to return humans to the Moon in 2025 including its first woman and first non-white astronaut. Under the Artemis program, NASA is planning a series of missions of increasing complexity to return to the Moon and build a sustained presence in order to develop and test technologies for an eventual journey to Mars.

The first, Artemis 1, flew an uncrewed spacecraft around the Moon in 2022. Artemis 2, planned for November 2024, will do the same with crew on board. NASA sees the Moon as a pit stop for missions to Mars and has done a deal with Finnish mobile firm Nokia to set up a 4G network there.

However, NASA said this week that

One giant step Moon race hots up



the Artemis 3 mission may not land humans on the Moon, depending on whether certain key elements, including the landing system developed by SpaceX, were ready. Elon Musk's firm won the contract for a landing system based on a version of its prototype Starship rocket, which remains far from ready. An orbital test flight of the uncrewed Starship ended in a dramatic explosion in April.

Russia's Luna

Russia's launch of Luna-25 on Friday will be its first to the Moon since

1976 and marks the beginning of Moscow's new lunar project. President Vladimir Putin is looking to strengthen space cooperation with China after ties with the West broke down following the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

New players

Recent technological progress has reduced the cost of missions and opened the way for new players in the public and private sector to get involved. India's latest space mission Chandrayaan-3 entered the Moon's

orbit in August ahead of the country's second attempted lunar landing later this month.

But getting to the Moon is not an easy task. Zionist's non-profit SpaceIL launched its Beresheet lunar lander in 2019, but it crashed. And in April this year Japan's ispace was the latest company to try, and fail, at the historic bid to put a private lunar lander on the Moon. Two other US companies, Astrobot and Intuitive Machines, are set to try later in the year. —AFP



This handout photograph shows technicians preparing the Luna-25 rover (Moon-25) for the launch at the Vostochny cosmodrome, some 180 km north of Blagoveshensk, in the Amur region.



In this handout photograph a Soyuz 2.1b rocket with the Luna-25 lander is seen transported to the launch pad ahead of its launch scheduled for August 11, 2023.



This handout photograph shows technicians finishing to assemble a Soyuz 2.1b rocket carrying the Luna-25 lander ahead of its launch.

Sports

EPL clubs splash out over \$1.3 billion on fresh faces

Five Premier League new signings to watch

MANCHESTER: Premier League clubs have splashed out over £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) on fresh faces ahead of the start of the new season on Friday. Arsenal have led the way by spending more than £200 million on Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber as they aim to topple defending champions Manchester City. Manchester United, Newcastle, Liverpool and Chelsea have also been busy with competition fierce just for a top-four finish. But treble winners City remain the side to beat as they eye a historic fourth consecutive English top-flight title. AFP Sport looks at five of the biggest transfers of the window so far:

Declan Rice (Arsenal)

Arsenal were City's surprise challengers for the title last season as the Gunners topped the table for most of the campaign before stumbling down the final straight. Rice's determination to join Mikel Arteta's men despite reported interest from City was another indication that Arsenal are a team on the up. Arsenal had to smash their transfer record with a bid that could rise to £105 million to prise the England international away from West Ham. With that fee comes great expectations for Rice to prove the difference maker in ending a 20-year wait to bring the Premier League title back to north London. The 24-year-old will be tasked with running the midfield at the Emirates and providing the platform for a talented array of young attackers to fire at the top end of the pitch.

Rasmus Hojlund (Man Utd)

A pursuit to bring England captain Harry Kane to Old Trafford never materialized as United instead

bet on the promise of 20-year-old Dane Hojlund to satisfy their need for a striker. An initial £64 million fee for a player that cost Atalanta just £17 million a year ago has raised eyebrows. Hojlund scored nine goals in his only season in Serie A. But his six goals in six caps for his country have shown a glimpse of his potential. An imposing physique, blistering pace and Scandinavian roots have seen Hojlund compared to City superstar Erling Haaland.

Josko Gvardiol (Man City)

City's major move has been for Croatian centre-back Gvardiol in a deal from RB Leipzig worth £78 million. The giant 21-year-old starred in his country's run to the World Cup semi-finals last year. However, he faces stiff competition at the Etihad with Pep Guardiola now having six international centre-backs to choose from. Guardiola has insisted that is "absolutely not too many" as he often played a back four entirely of natural central defenders towards the end of last season.

Dominik Szoboszlai (Liverpool)

Liverpool's disappointing fifth-placed finish last season exposed the need for an overhaul of an ageing midfield. Szoboszlai and Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister bring the promise of more dynamism and a goal threat, but further reinforcements are needed to cover the departures of captain Jordan Henderson, Fabinho, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Naby Keita and James Milner. Hungarian international Szoboszlai also arrives in England from Leipzig in a £60 million deal. The 22-year-old scored 20 goals and provided 22 assists in 91 games for the German side.



Arsenal's English midfielder Declan Rice

Sandro Tonali (Newcastle)

The riches on offer to players in the Saudi Pro League has emerged as a threat to even some of the Premier League's giants in recent months. However, the gulf state's direct interest in the English top-flight has been more constrained than expected. Backed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, Newcastle have again resisted the tempta-

tion to mark their return to the Champions League with an influx of star names. But they did splash out a record £60 million for an Italian player on Tonali from AC Milan. The tenacious 23-year-old midfielder helped his boyhood heroes to a first Serie A title for 11 years in 2022 before playing a key role in a run to the Champions League semi-finals last season. — AFP



SYDNEY: England's Billy Vunipola warms up for the captain's run at Coogee Oval in Sydney. — AFP

Farrell leads England in Wales World Cup warm-up

LONDON: England recalled several senior players, including Billy Vunipola, to a side once again captained by regular skipper Owen Farrell for their return Rugby World Cup warm-up match against Wales at Twickenham on Saturday. A largely second-string England side suffered a 20-9 defeat by Wales in their opening warm-up match in Cardiff last weekend.

England coach Steve Borthwick has since named his squad for the World Cup, which gets underway in France next month, and the team he announced Thursday appears to be close to his strongest XV. Up front, Vunipola — the only specialist No 8 in the World Cup squad — returns to make his first Test start since the 2022 end-of-year internationals, having missed the Six Nations after a run of poor form and then undergone successive knee operations.

England's pack also includes several seasoned campaigners — back-row Courtney Lawes, lock Maro Itoje, hooker Jamie George and prop Joe Marler — who were all involved in the 2019 World Cup final defeat by South Africa in Japan. England struggled to take their chances at the Principality Stadium last weekend. Former England captain Borthwick has recalled two proven finishers to his starting XV in wings Elliot Daly and Henry Arundell.

Daly will be making his first England appearance since the 2022 Six Nations, having been discarded by former coach Eddie Jones before a torn hamstring stopped him returning for this year's Championship.

The 20-year-old Arundell, who has signed for Paris-based Racing 92 following the financial collapse of London Irish, has long been regarded as one of English rugby's most exciting talents. This weekend's match will mark just his second Test start and eighth cap in total, with Arundell passed fit after recovering from the hamstring injury that ruled him out of last weekend's match in Cardiff.

Elsewhere in the backs, centres Ollie Lawrence and Joe Marchant have been given the opportunity to prove they should be England's first-choice midfield combination at the World Cup. Ellis Genge will win his 50th cap this weekend when the front row comes off the bench. "We are very much looking forward to our return to Twickenham on Saturday and the opportunity to play in front of our supporters again," Borthwick said. "England versus Wales is always a special fixture and we are pleased to be playing the visitors again so soon."

"We're delighted for Ellis who will win his 50th cap from the bench. He's a brilliant professional, both on and off the field." Wales coach Warren Gatland named his side on Wednesday, with the New Zealander making 15 changes. England have a tough start to their World Cup campaign, against Argentina in Marseille on September 9. — AFP

Alcaraz off the mark in Toronto; Monfils stuns Tsitsipas

TORONTO: Carlos Alcaraz won his 13th ATP match in a row as the world number one began the Toronto Masters by defeating Ben Shelton 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) on Wednesday. The second-round battle of the two 20-year-olds went to the Spaniard, who is bidding for Canadian success after winning successive trophies at Queen's Club and Wimbledon. Alcaraz now stands 48-4 on the season as he begins the build-up for his defense of the US Open title.

The top seed admitted that he was out-hit at times by his 41st-ranked American opponent in the 56-minute contest — his first career win in Toronto. "He was more aggressive than me from the start," Alcaraz said. "I tried to be solid and find my rhythm but I had some trouble. "But I'm happy to be through to the next round. Matches like this help to focus. I have to play better from now on," added Alcaraz, who faces Polish 15th seed Hubert Hurkacz in the last 16.

Elsewhere Wednesday, French veteran Gael Monfils stunned fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, winning in straight sets to advance to the last 16. The 36-year-old from Paris — currently ranked 276th in the world — powered past Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-3 in just under 90 minutes. The win marked the first time Monfils has beaten a player in the top 10 since March 2022, and came against an in-form Tsitsipas fresh from winning



TORONTO: Carlos Alcaraz of Spain hits a shot against Ben Shelton of the United States during Day Three of the National Bank Open, part of the Hologic ATP Tour on August 9, 2023. — AFP

Hooper and Cooper axed from Wallabies World Cup squad

SYDNEY: Michael Hooper, Quade Cooper and Len Ikitau were shock omissions from a young Wallabies World Cup squad named Thursday with Will Skelton handed the captain's armband ahead of veteran James Slipper. Coach Eddie Jones also named three uncapped players among the 33 for the September-October tournament in France, including scrum-half Issak Fines-Leleiwasa, 18-year-old back Max Jorgensen, and prop Blake Schoupp.

It is the most inexperienced Wallabies World Cup squad in the professional era, with only eight of them having played the showpiece tournament before. "It's a young squad, it's an exciting squad and it will be a successful squad," said former England boss Jones, who has lost all four Tests since being appointed in January.

"We are making good progress. Our challenge is to continue to improve. To get a little bit better every day in everything we do on and off the field. "As I've

the ATP Los Cabos title in Mexico last weekend. Monfils, who reached the Washington third round last week, overcame 29 unforced errors to advance.

'Stayed cool'

It took two match points for Monfils to get the job done, with a shotmaking duel on the first winning chance ending in Tsitsipas' favor before the French veteran closed out victory moments later. "After (losing) the first match point, I stayed very calm and tried to make simple choices," Monfils said. "I just stayed cool, there was no panic. "I knew Stef came here with a lot of confidence and would be going for his shots."

"I played a solid match, I was very happy with the way I was moving on the court again. "For me, it's always key to have great movement. So I was happy with that." In other games Wednesday, second seed Daniil Medvedev advanced to the third round with a 6-2, 7-5 win over Matteo Arnaldi. Medvedev said he needed to make more of an effort in the second set in the steamy summer conditions against Arnaldi. He struck 26 winners and 18 unforced errors.

"It felt great, but I could have played better in the second set," Medvedev said. "There were two or three games where I had to save break points. "It was a pretty good match, now I need to improve further. "It's hot conditions during the summer and I need to get used to them. That usually takes two or three games." Medvedev improved to 8-1 in Toronto with his victory, his 47th this season. Britain's Andy Murray continued to show steady improvement as the August 28 start of the US Open draws closer, with the 36-year-old defeating qualifier Max Purcell 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 7-5. — AFP

Rugby is the king in France oval world

PARIS: There is a region in south-west France where the walls of bars and bedrooms are adorned not with pictures of Kylian Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele but Antoine Dupont, Cyril Baille and Romain Ntamack. This is the 'Ovalie', a region where rugby is king, the world of the oval ball. The village of Saint-Sulpice-sur-Leze, which dates from the 13th century and lies around 30 kilometers south of Toulouse, is just one example of this: with a population of just over 2,000 village life revolves around the fortunes of its rugby club.

The club has been going since 1912 and although they have never won any titles, there is always a good turn out when the team takes the field at the Gaston-Sauret stadium for their latest clash in Federale 1 — the highest level of amateur rugby in France. Last season they missed the chance for promotion to the fourth-tier National 2 when they narrowly lost a quarter-final play-off to Valence d'Aggen. Given the size of the village, though, the club is punching well above its weight, spurred on by the enthusiasm of the community.

Off the field, a giant mural proclaiming "100 years of rugby passion" is a reminder of the village's love affair with the game and there is no doubt there will be a sizeable gathering at the club to watch France's World Cup opener against New Zealand on September 8. The French have reached the World Cup final three times, in 1987, 1999 and 2011, but this time they are tipped to collect their first title.

Six Nations runners-up, Fabien Galthie's side have played some sensational rugby with captain Dupont the new general at scrum-half. Apart from the All Blacks, France also play Italy, Uruguay and Namibia in Pool A. Their path to the final, however, is likely to hit a roadbump in the quarter-finals when they are likely to meet either holders South Africa or Six Nations champions Ireland — one of only two teams to beat them since Australia in July 2021.

But with home advantage and the 'Ovalie' behind them, anything is possible for Les Bleus. Ahead of the Rugby World Cup in France, Agence France-Presse asked 20 aspiring photographers from each country qualified for the competition to show one aspect of the rugby union culture in their homeland, with the help of Canon cameras who are sponsoring the tournament. From Namibia to Fiji via Georgia and Scotland this photo essay gives us a glimpse of the core values of rugby on five continents. — AFP

said since I took over, in Australian rugby we have the talent, but we don't yet have the team. That's still the case. But we are getting there and I'm backing that we will surprise a few people." Flanker Hooper, who spent two months out of the game on a mental health break last year, is Australia's most-capped skipper, having led the side in 69 of his 125 Tests.

He picked up a calf injury earlier this year and missed their last three Tests, but was reportedly eager to play and aiming to be ready for their World Cup opener against Georgia on September



Michael Hooper

9. Instead, Jones kept faith with youngsters Fraser McReight and Tom Hooper, who stepped up in his absence. Hooper's omission likely draws the curtain on his international career. He has previously said he would either retire after the World Cup, move overseas or bid to make their Sevens team for the 2024 Paris Olympics. It could be a similar fate for Cooper, who was widely expected to be on the plane. In his absence, Australia have just one recognized fly-half in Carter Gordon, who has only played four Tests. Regular star centre Ikitau was another expected to make the cut despite battling a shoulder injury. "I've backed the young blokes because they earned it," said Jones. "Simple as that. I haven't handed it to them. They grabbed it. It's exciting for me to go to work each day with these guys who are just busting to improve, to learn and to get better."

Equally surprising was giant lock Skelton, who plays his rugby in France with La Rochelle, being named captain. Ahead of the Rugby Championship Hooper and Slipper were announced as co-captains through to the World Cup, and scrum-half Tate McDermott did the job in their last Test against New Zealand. "We just feel we need someone who can bring the squad together and make it a little bit tighter," he said. "He's got all those attributes and he's a really good team man." — AFP

Sports

Man City begin bid for Premier League history

Liverpool face Chelsea test

MANCHESTER: Manchester City kick-off the new Premier League season at Burnley on Friday to begin their bid to become the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles. Arsenal appear best-placed to capitalize if City's grip on the English game is to come to an end and will expect to get off to a flier at home to Nottingham Forest on Saturday. Liverpool and Chelsea face an early test of how they will bounce back from disappointing seasons when they face off at Stamford Bridge on Sunday. AFP Sport looks at the pick of the action from the opening weekend of the Premier League campaign.

Kompany to burst City bubble

City are still riding the wave of euphoria from the end of last season as they added the club's first ever Champions League to go with Premier League and FA Cup glory. The summer has not been without its challenges for Pep Guardiola as captain Ilkay Gundogan departed to Barcelona and the riches on offer in Saudi Arabia was too much for Riyad Mahrez to turn down. City have also had to fight to retain Kyle Walker and Bernardo Silva, while Croatian duo Mateo Kovacic and Josko Gvardiol are

the new only two new arrivals in the transfer market so far.

Guardiola's opposite number in the dugout on Friday already has a statue outside the Etihad from his playing days, but Vincent Kompany has quickly established himself as one of the brightest coaching talents on the continent. The former Belgian captain turned around a club in crisis during his first season at Turf Moor to return Burnley to the Premier League with seven games to spare. The Claret's are a very different proposition to the side that punched above their weight to survive for six seasons in the top flight under Sean Dyche between 2016 and 2022.

Inspired by Guardiola, Kompany has transformed Burnley into a side that dominate the ball. "I would play every week of every month of every year against a team the level of Man City," said Kompany. "That is the best way to improve. You won't get them all right, it's impossible with the quality of that team - possibly the best team at the moment in world football - but that's the best challenge so I wouldn't want it any different." Burnley, though, did see the downside of opening up against City when they lost 6-0 in the FA Cup quarter-finals last season.

Chelsea's Nkunku blow

Optimism around Chelsea's positive performances in pre-season under new boss Mauricio Pochettino has been punctured by the news that Christopher Nkunku will be sidelined for up to four months after undergoing knee surgery. The French international was brought to Stamford Bridge to ease the Blues' goalscoring woes after they finished 12th last season - their lowest since 1994. Pochettino's time in charge gets off to a testing start when Liverpool visit looking to put their own disappointment from last season behind them.

But all is also not well at Anfield with fans frustrated at the lack of new arrivals. Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai are Jurgen Klopp's only two new signings to help fill the void left by the departure of captain Jordan Henderson, Fabinho, James Milner, Naby Keita, Alex Oxlade Chamberlain and Roberto Firmino. The array of attacking weapons on offer to Klopp has shown in a free-scoring pre-season, but the Reds have also looked defensively weak with little protection for the back four from the midfield. "I can understand some people having doubts," said new skipper Virgil van Dijk.

**Burnley's Belgian head coach Vincent Kompany****Wolves in crisis**

Manchester United begin their quest for a first league title in a decade on Monday against a Wolves side who were left without a manager just three days before the season begins. Julen Lopetegui stepped down on Tuesday after becoming disillusioned with the lack of resources to spend in the transfer market. Gary O'Neil has

stepped into the hotseat at Molineux tasked with repeating his success in keeping Bournemouth up against the odds last season. United will expect to get off to a winning start at Old Trafford, but the home crowd will have to wait for their first sight of new striker Rasmus Hojlund. The Dane is suffering a back injury that is set to keep him out for a few weeks. — AFP

Japan eye World Cup semis-finals; England face Colombia test

AUCKLAND: The Women's World Cup is down to the last eight, with European champions England widely seen as the favorites to lift the trophy following the elimination of holders the United States. AFP Sport looks ahead to the quarter-final action on Friday and Saturday in Australia and New Zealand:

Spain v Netherlands

(Wellington, Friday at 0100 GMT) The first quarter-final might be the most-evenly matched, with a Spain side sitting sixth in the world rankings facing the ninth-ranked Netherlands. Spain are in the quarter-finals for the first time despite reigning Ballon d'Or Alexia Putellas struggling to make an impact as she continues to recover fitness following a ruptured ACL. Instead her Barcelona teammate Aitana Bonmati has been the standout.

Coach Jorge Vilda made sweeping changes to his line-up for the 5-1 last-16 win over Switzerland and must decide whether to stick with the likes of Laia Codina in central defense and Cata Coll in goal. The Netherlands, runners-up in 2019, have put the absence at the tournament due to injury of prolific striker Vivianne Miedema behind them and topped their group ahead of the USA. Andries Jonker's team have conceded just one goal so far. They will need to be strong at the back against a Spain team that has notched 13 goals in four games.

Japan v Sweden

(Auckland, Friday at 0730 GMT) Practically written off before the tournament, Japan are the only former World Cup winners still standing following the exits of

the USA, Germany and Norway. The 2011 champions have been clinical, scoring 14 goals and letting in just one in wins over Zambia (5-0), Costa Rica (2-0), Spain (4-0) and Norway (3-1).

The player grabbing the attention is Hinata Miyazawa, the 23-year-old leader in the race for the golden boot with five goals. But it is not just about her. "They're so disciplined and very structured in the way they play offense and defense," said Norway's Caroline Graham Hansen after the last 16. World number three Sweden are the top-ranked team left in the tournament after they ousted the USA on penalties. However, they were second-best throughout that game and grateful to goalkeeper Zecira Musovic for several key saves. They have now kept three consecutive clean sheets. Japan beat Sweden 3-1 in the semi-finals in 2011, but Sweden won by the same scoreline when they met at the Tokyo Olympics.

Australia v France

(Brisbane, Saturday at 0700 GMT) Australia appear to be getting stronger as they go along, surviving a wobble in the group stage before comfortably dispatching Denmark 2-0 in the last 16. They are aiming to reach the semi-finals for the first time and are boosted by the return to fitness of star striker Sam Kerr, who returned from three weeks out with a calf problem as a substitute against Denmark. "For (other) teams looking ahead it's pretty scary to know that she's back in the team and she's going to be a part of it with us," said Caitlin Foord.

France are hoping Australia suffer the same fate as befell them four years ago, when as hosts they went out in the quarter-finals to the eventual winners, the USA. Herve Renard's team cruised through in the last 16, beating Morocco 4-0. They have scored 12 goals in their last three games, but they will have to deal with a hostile atmosphere from 50,000 spectators. "It won't be an easy match, but it won't be easy for either team," warned Renard, whose side lost 1-0 to

Paris Saint-Germain earlier this year for 45 million euros. Bayern had been on the lookout for a striker since the departure of star forward Robert Lewandowski to Barcelona at the end of the 2021-22 season. The club won the Bundesliga in each of the Pole's eight seasons in Munich, with Lewandowski scoring 344 goals in 375 appearances. The Bavarians struggled in Lewandowski's absence last season.

Top England goalscorer

During his eight years in Munich, Lewandowski averaged 30 goals per season. In 2022-23, not one Bayern player hit the 15 league goal mark. They were eliminated by eventual winners Manchester City in the quarter-finals of the Champions League and won the Bundesliga title on goal difference after a final-day capitulation from Borussia Dortmund. Kane has scored more than 20 league goals in all but three of the past nine Premier League seasons, winning the golden boot on three occasions. Despite finishing second in last season's Premier League scoring charts behind Erling Haaland (36), Kane netted 30 league goals in 2022-23, equaling his best mark. England's record goalscorer, Kane played a major role in the country's journey back from the international wilderness to regular contenders for major tournament glory.

He joined Tottenham's academy youth academy in 2009 but in his early career many doubted he would ever make it to the highest level. Mauricio Pochettino, then in the early days of his successful spell as Tottenham boss, trusted Kane's potential enough to select him regularly in the 2014-15 season. Kane repaid Pochettino's gamble with a barrage of goals which quickly

**AUCKLAND:** Japan's goalkeeper Chika Hirao attends a training session at North Harbour Stadium in Auckland on August 10, 2023, ahead of their Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup football match against Sweden. — AFP

Australia in a friendly in Melbourne on July 14.

England v Colombia

(Sydney, Saturday at 1030 GMT) England are the favorites to win the trophy, while Colombia are the surprise quarter-finalists, and 21 places separate the teams in the world rankings. However, England stumbled into the last eight, needing penalties to see off Nigeria, and they cannot afford to take Colombia lightly given the South Americans beat Germany in the group stage and have one of the most exciting players at the tournament in Linda Caicedo. Sarina Wiegman's European champions are also hindered by the absence of Lauren James, with the 21-year-old Chelsea attacker suspended after being sent off against Nigeria for stamping on an opponent. Colombia reached the quarter-finals for the first time by beating Jamaica 1-0 and will hope to have a lot of support like in previous rounds. "We are dreaming big — we can do this," said captain Catalina Usme. — AFP

**English striker Harry Kane**

gained him international recognition. He exploded into a global star at the 2018 World Cup in Russia where, as captain, the striker led England to the semi-finals for the first time in 28 years.

But some in Germany have lamented the price tag for Kane and seen Bayern's efforts to sign him as a sign of problems in the Bundesliga. The huge sum set to be paid is "for a player whose contract expires next year. And who would then be available free of charge," read a comment piece earlier this week in Bild. It would be an "indictment" of "German football as a whole," it said. "Why haven't we been able to develop talented centre forwards ourselves for years? We used to have a plethora of them." — AFP

Colombia historic WCup run 'years in the making'

SYDNEY: Colombia's run to the Women's World Cup quarter-finals may have taken many by surprise, but for coach Nelson Abadia it is the product of years of building. The South Americans face European champions England on Saturday in Sydney and no matter what happens, this has been a breakthrough moment for Colombian women's football. It is only the national team's third World Cup and they failed to qualify for the previous edition in 2019, when Abadia was also in charge.

But Colombia did not panic and now they are reaping the benefits with a place in the last eight for the first time. Forward Linda Caicedo has been one of the stars of the World Cup and in the 1-0 win over Jamaica in the last 16 Abadia also gave a start to defender Ana Guzman. Both are 18.

"Linda, as well as Ana Maria, came into the national (youth) team when they were 12 years old," said Abadia. "We've been growing together since they were 12 years old and stimulating their growth into what they are today." The 67-year-old Abadia has been involved with the women's national team for nearly a decade, first as technical assistant to coach Fabian Taborda. In 2017 he was promoted to the top job and has made a point of working closely with the national youth teams. In 2019 Colombia's women footballers won gold at the Pan American Games for the first time and they were runners-up at last year's Copa America, losing the final to Brazil but qualifying for the World Cup. Caicedo and Guzman were part of the team which topped their group at last year's U-20 World Cup only to be defeated by regional rivals Brazil in the last 16. "We started with that process since they were 12 years old, and then at the U-20 World Cup they were 17 years old," Abadia said. "So it's been since 2017 that we started this renewal process."

Abadia's vision

Abadia spent years going all over Colombia scouting for young players, part of what he called "a methodical process". "Thank God it paid off," he said after the Jamaica win, praising Colombian football bosses for sticking with him and his vision. "I was able to visualize them playing for the national teams. I was doing scouting up and down the country and collecting information on potential players."

Guzman came into the side because of suspension to Manuela Vanegas and as well as helping them to a clean sheet against Jamaica, the teenager set up skipper Catalina Usme for the winning goal with a wonderful cross-field pass. On the eve of the match, Guzman described Abadia as "a key person in my life", saying he had shaped her as a player and person. Sarina Wiegman's European champions England will be favorites to win on Saturday and reach the semi-finals. But Colombia have already surprised Germany in the group phase. Caicedo scoring one of the goals of the tournament in a 2-1 win that contributed to the Germans' early exit. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010

Adan Hospital	23940620
lbn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoum Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Change of Name

I, Regene Roki Coutinho, holder of Indian Passport No. F8110803 having permanent address R/o Cross Wada, Angadi Karwar Taluka, Karnataka, do hereby change my name as **Regina Rocky Coutinho** for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **Regina Rocky Coutinho**, and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. 11/8/2023

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Saudi Pro League kicks off

Clubs in oil-rich Gulf state woo global stars

RIYADH: The Saudi Pro League kicks off on Friday amid unprecedented attention on Saudi football following a year of high-profile transfers. Clubs in the oil-rich Gulf state have lured global stars, with Karim Benzema, Jordan Henderson and Sadio Mane among those following in Cristiano Ronaldo's footsteps. Last month Al-Hilal made a 300-million-euro (\$328 million) bid for Kylian Mbappe, though the Paris Saint-Germain striker reportedly refused to meet with officials from the club.

Eighteen clubs will take part in the league, with each allowed eight foreign players. "Saudi Arabia aspires to be like the English Premier League," said Simon Chadwick, professor of Sport and Geopolitical Econo-



Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo

my at Skema Business School in Paris. "The media is paying attention," he told AFP. "I'm aware of people now asking the question: where can I watch the Saudi Pro League?". Just five years after allowing its first non-Muslim tourists and letting women drive, Saudi Arabia is attempting to open up its conservative, long-cloistered society to the world.

The world's biggest oil exporter has thrown hundreds of millions at sports deals including Ronaldo's capture, Formula One in Jeddah and the lucrative LIV Golf tour, drawing frequent claims it is "sportswashing". It is all part of grand plans by the de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to modernize the Saudi economy and remove its reliance on oil before the world moves on to other fuels. Moqbel Al-Zabni, editor-in-chief of the Saudi capital's Al Riyadiah newspaper said that the kingdom wants "the compass of professional football to point to the Middle East and the Arab world".

'Changed the market'

Ronaldo's arrival in January to play for the Riyadh-based Al-Nassr club is what first drew global attention to ongoing efforts to boost the Saudi Pro League. The kingdom is offering eye-watering salaries that have lured celebrity players, rising stars and top coaches. "I've worked in sport for 40 years and I've never seen a project as big, as ambitious and as determined to be a success," British director Peter Hutton, who sits on the league's board, told the BBC. Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said the Saudi league has "completely changed the market" and he expects more high-profile players to move there.

The influx has taken place despite frequent criticism that Saudi Arabia's lavish spending amounts to an attempt to shift the focus from its record on human rights. "Most of the head-

lines are about Saudi attracting big players, not the long prison sentences handed down to activists," a Western diplomat in Riyadh told AFP on the condition of anonymity. However, the kingdom still faces a series of challenges before it could rise to the helm of global football, said Egyptian sports journalist and TV host Amir Abd El-halim. "There are challenges at all levels," he said, including respecting the contracts and entitlements of new players.

Last month, FIFA hit Al-Nassr with a transfer ban, blocking the club from registering new players. It was issued after Al-Nassr failed to make a payment of £390,000 to Leicester City for the 2018 transfer of Nigeria striker Ahmed Musa. Chadwick, the professor, said that Saudi football is still "very much a work in progress". "We're probably looking at the next five to ten years before determining whether there is a long-term sustainable and fundamental change," the expert added.

One test, he said, will be Saudi clubs' performances in the Asian Champions League. A second test will be the extent to which the Saudi Pro League can sustain long-term engagement from football fans, who fly from all the world to watch the English Premier League. "Is it going to be the same in Saudi Arabia?" Chadwick asked. "Are we going to see Chinese tourists heading to Riyadh or are we going to see German tourists heading together to watch football?" — AFP

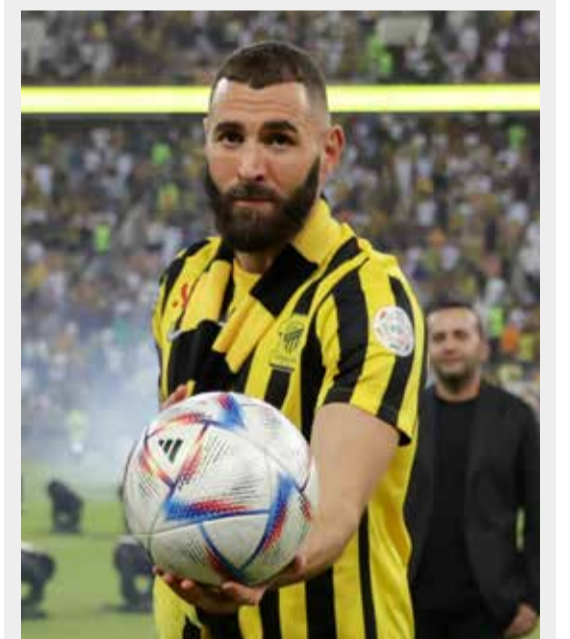
The stars signing up for Saudi football project

PARIS: Saudi Arabia has emerged as a force in the football transfer market this year, offering eye-watering salaries that have lured a host of big names to the oil-rich Gulf kingdom. Here, AFP Sport takes a look at some of the biggest names to make the move:

The stars

Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival in January to play for Riyadh-based Al-Nassr is what first drew global attention to ongoing efforts to boost the Saudi Pro League. He was followed by his former Real Madrid teammate Karim Benzema, the 2022 Ballon d'Or winner who signed a three-year contract with Al-Ittihad in June. Just a few days later, fellow Frenchman N'Golo Kante joined the same Jeddah-based club, also on a three-year deal.

The veteran and member of France's victorious 2018 World Cup squad will form a partnership with Brazilian Fabinho, arriving from Liverpool, in midfield. Still buzzing from his historic FA Cup semi-final hat-trick for Manchester City in April, Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez has signed for four years with Jeddah-based Al-Ahli, a transfer estimated at 35 million euros. The latest coup for the Saudis is Sadio Mane, the Senegalese star who signed with Ronaldo's Al-Nassr for a reported annual salary of 40 million euros plus 10 million euros in results-based bonuses.



JEDDAH: French forward Karim Benzema greets the crowd during his unveiling at King Abdullah Sports City stadium in Jeddah. — AFP

Past their prime

Along with top-tier stars, several other big names in the sport are starting new chapters in Saudi Arabia. Marcelo Brozovic, who captained Inter Milan in last season's Champions League final, has signed a three-year deal with Al-Nassr, who reportedly paid a transfer fee of 18 million euros. Ex-Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson has joined Al-Ettifaq until 2026, drawing heavy criticism. Another former Liverpool star, Brazilian international Roberto Firmino, left the team after eight seasons for Al-Ahli, who have also landed Edouard Mendy of Senegal. Kalidou Koulibaly, for his part, bade farewell to Stamford Bridge for Al-Hilal for a reported transfer fee of 23 million euros.

Rising talent

It is not just fading stars who are making the trip to the Gulf. The 28-year-old Ivorian midfielder Seko Fofana has also joined Ronaldo at Al-Nassr, leaving French outfit Lens as they prepare to return to the Champions League. After eight years with Lazio, Serbian midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, also 28, has inked a three-year deal with Al-Hilal. He will be joined by 26-year-old Ruben Neves, the Portuguese star who was previously tipped for a move to Barcelona. Another 26-year-old, Frenchman Allan Saint-Maximin, has joined Al-Ahli from Newcastle, which is 80-percent owned by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund.

The coaches

The Saudi Pro League has also drawn renowned coaches. Dismissed by Aston Villa in October, iconic former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard signed with Al-Ettifaq until 2025, and a clip of him introducing himself in halting Arabic has gone viral on social media. Former Croatia and West Ham boss Slaven Bilic will join the Al-Fateh bench. After leaving Fenerbahce in June, former Benfica coach Jorge Jesus has returned to Al-Hilal, where he worked in 2018-2019. And in late July, Al-Ahli named 35-year-old German Matthias Jaissle, regarded as one of the most promising managers of his generation, as their new coach. — AFP

Rangers edge Servette 2-1

PARIS: Rangers gained a narrow advantage in their Champions League opener on Wednesday as the Scottish side returned to Europe where last season they suffered six humbling defeats. Rangers edged out Servette of Switzerland 2-1 in the first leg of their final qualifying round tie at Ibrox. The Swiss may be slight favourites to progress to the play-off round when the two sides clash in the second leg next Tuesday, but at least Rangers went some way to erasing the pain of their last continental adventure.

After reaching the 2022/23 group stage after a 12-year absence, they slumped to defeats, home and away, to Liverpool, Napoli and Ajax. Having lost their Scottish Premiership season opener 1-0 to unheralded Kilmarnock at the weekend, they were 2-0 up on Servette inside 15 minutes on Tuesday. Captain James Tavernier scored a penalty in the sixth minute before striker Cyril Dessers knocked in a second eight minutes later for his first Rangers goal.

Just before half-time, however, Servette striker Chris Bedia reduced the deficit from the penalty spot after VAR intervened to flag up a Dessers handball. Servette's David Douline, who conceded the penalty for a foul on Todd Cantwell, was sent off



Servette striker Chris Bedia

in the 59th minute for picking up the second of two yellow cards. "We'll have to take the win and put in a good performance next week. We were always going to have to do that," Rangers boss Michael Beale told the BBC.

"It was a fantastic start. We played with real energy, we ran forward, gave a lot to the game and created so many chances." Thirty years after they were crowned European champions for the first and only time, Marseille slipped to a 1-0 defeat at Panathinaikos. Brazilian Bernard scored the winner in the 83rd minute from a pass by Ioannis Papadimitrou. "We haven't played many European matches but this is undoubtedly the most successful," said Panathinaikos coach Ivan Jovanovic.

'Below the level'

"Overall, for this time of year, it was a very good game and I'm satisfied." The French side had been reduced to 10 men following a 65th-minute red card for Geoffrey Kondogbia, one of three summer signings on show on Wednesday along with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Ismaila Sarr. "We were below the level we hoped for, especially in the attack," said Marseille coach Marcelino.

"That's how it is. We are still building, we had very little time to work. That's not an excuse but it's the reality." The night's other tie saw Maccabi Haifa of Zionist entity come away from Slovan Bratislava in Slovakia with a 2-1 win. All three goals came inside the first 15 minutes with Diaa Sabia grabbing the winner after Haitian international Frantzly Pierrot's fifth-minute opener for the Zionist entity's side had been cancelled out by Juraj Kucka.

On Tuesday, KI Klaksvik of the Faroe Islands defeated Norway's Molde 2-1 to stay in the hunt for an improbable spot in the group stage. The Faroeese champions fell behind to a goal from ex-Manchester United youngster Magnus Wolff Eikrem in Torshavn before Arni Frederiksberg scored twice to give Klaksvik the edge going into next week's return leg. Klaksvik, based in a town which boasts just 5,000 inhabitants, are already guaranteed to become the first Faroeese club to secure a place in the group stage of a European competition. — AFP

James banned for World Cup stamp

SYDNEY: England forward Lauren James received a two-match ban from FIFA on Thursday for the stamp on Nigeria's Michelle Alozie that earned her a red card in the Women's World Cup last 16. The 21-year-old Chelsea attacker was sent off in the 87th minute of Monday's match in Brisbane, which European champions England went on to win on penalties.

She will miss England's quarter-final against Colombia in Sydney on Saturday as well as a potential semi-final, but would be available to return should the Lionesses reach the final on August 20. James apologized on Tuesday to Alozie over the incident, tweeting: "All my love and respect to you." "I am sorry for what happened," added James. Separately, the England team released a statement of their own saying: "Lauren is really sorry for her actions which led to the red card and is full of remorse. "It is wholly out of character for her." — AFP



BRISBANE: Nigeria's defender #22 Michelle Alozie (lower) reacts after being fouled by England's forward #07 Lauren James during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 football match at Brisbane Stadium. — AFP