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Saudi Crown Prince accepts invitation to pay visit to Iran

Kuwait FM applauds Iranian counterpart's visit to Saudi Arabia



JEDDAH: Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman on Aug 18, 2023. — AFP

JEDDAH: Iran's foreign minister met Saudi Arabia's crown prince on Friday during his first visit since the Middle East rivals announced a surprise rapprochement, officials said. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who travelled to Riyadh on Thursday, held talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah, the Saudi foreign ministry announced, after extending a scheduled one-day visit.

The two reviewed relations between the countries, "future opportunities for cooperation... and ways to develop them, in addition to discussing developments in the situation on the regional and international arenas", the foreign ministry posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. Iran's official IRNA news agency said the visit was the first time a senior Iranian official had met with Prince Mohammed, 37, who has ushered in a series of reforms in the conservative kingdom.

IRNA later reported that Iran extended an invitation for the Saudi crown prince to visit the Islamic republic and that Prince Mohammed accepted. In a statement posted on X, Amir-Abdollahian called the 90-minute meeting a "direct, frank, and productive conversation" that addressed bilateral relations, security and development. "The way to the success of the region is to strengthen dialogue and cooperation and increase development-oriented cooperation," he said, according to a statement from Tehran's foreign ministry.

Iran and Saudi broke off ties in 2016, but they agreed to restore diplomatic relations in a Chinese-brokered deal in March. The announcement sparked optimism as the two regional heavyweights have backed opposing sides in conflict zones across the Middle East for years, including in Yemen, Saudi Arabia's impoverished neighbor. On Thursday, Amir-Abdollahian said ties "are progressing in the right direction" as he appeared in front of the media with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

His visit would "be a prelude to the meeting of the heads of the two countries", he said, without specifying when Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi would travel to Saudi Arabia at King Salman's invitation. Iran's top diplomat hailed economic and security cooperation between the two countries, but announced no new agreements. He was accompanied by Iran's new ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alireza Enayati.

"We are sure that these meetings and cooperation will help the unity of the Islamic world," Amir-Abdollahian added, proposing a "regional dialogue" without giving details. Since the March deal, Saudi Arabia has ramped up a push for peace in Yemen, holding direct talks with Houthi leaders in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, and championed the return of key Iran ally Syria to the Arab League.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

MoI: Pay fines before leaving

KUWAIT: The interior ministry said expatriate residents have to pay their traffic fines before leaving Kuwait, whatever the cause of departure might be. The decision, effective from Saturday, Aug 19, is part of measures to collect the ministry's debts owed by expatriates, it said in a press release on Friday. The payments can be made online or via traffic departments country-wide, and offices at land, marine and air borders, including Kuwait airport, according to the statement. — KUNA

X to scrap 'block' feature

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk said Friday his social media company X would scrap a feature that allows users to block posts from specific accounts. "Block is going to be deleted as a 'feature', except for DMs," Musk posted, indicating the option would still be available for "direct messages" between users of the social media platform, formerly known as Twitter. The feature is used to restrict interaction with specific accounts on the platform. — AFP

Gitmo judge rejects confession

WASHINGTON: A US military judge ruled for the first time Friday that an Al-Qaeda bombing suspect's confession cannot be used as evidence because it was derived from torture, potentially setting a new hurdle for Sept 11 prosecutions. The judge in the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba US military tribunals said that a confession by Abd al-Rahim Al-Nashiri, the alleged mastermind of the 2000 attack against the USS Cole in Yemen that left 17 dead, was tainted by years of abuse at the hands of the CIA and FBI. "Exclusion of such evidence is not without societal costs," wrote the judge, Col Lanny Acosta. — AFP

Thousands flee raging wildfires in western Canada

KELOWNA, Canada: Residents of western Canada scrambled to evacuate Saturday as raging wildfires encroached on two metropolitan areas — separate blazes that have sent tens of thousands fleeing over the course of just days. The devastating fires in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories are just the latest in a summer of dramatic wildfires across the country that have left millions of acres scorched.

According to estimates, 19,000 people were evacuated from Yellowknife, the Northwest Territories' capital, over 48 hours, its environment minister Shane Thompson said late Friday. The city, home to some 20,000, was largely a ghost town following the largest ever evacuation from the region. More than 2,000 km south in British Columbia, fire also bore down on Kelowna, a city of 150,000 people in the Okanagan Valley.

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KEREMEOS, Canada: The Crater Creek Fire burns in the background of this village in British Columbia on Aug 18, 2023. — AFP

Egypt activist Douma freed after pardon

CAIRO: Egyptian activist Ahmed Douma, a leading figure in the country's 2011 uprising who has spent the last decade behind bars, has been released following a presidential pardon, lawyers said Saturday. "President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi... has used his constitutional powers" to pardon several prisoners including Douma, said lawyer Tarek Elawady, a member of the presidential pardons committee.

Prominent rights lawyer Khaled Ali and other activists later posted a picture of Douma leaving Badr prison in Cairo's outskirts — a facility that has been repeatedly criticized for poor conditions. Douma was originally sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2015 for clashing with security forces but that was cut to 15 years in 2019.

Later that year, Egypt's top appeals court upheld the reduced sentence, as well as a fine of six million Egyptian pounds (\$372,000 at the time). Douma, now 37, was a leading activist in the 2011 uprising that toppled long-time president Hosni Mubarak. In 2021, he published a collection of poems entitled "Curly", written while he was held in solitary confinement. The collection was dis-

played at that year's Cairo International Book Fair but was quickly pulled for "security reasons".

In one of his poems from prison, Douma writes: "There's no time for depression, no opportunity for sadness, the flood is raging." He was arrested in the sweeping crackdown that followed the army's 2013 ouster of Mohamed Morsi, the Islamist elected after the uprising. Pro-democracy campaigners as well as Islamists were detained in mass arrests that drew international condemnation.

Key activists from the revolution remain behind bars, including British-Egyptian pro-democracy blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has spent the better part of the past decade behind bars. Rights activist Hossam Bahgat welcomed the pardon for Douma, but said the decision was made "without any transparency or understanding of why some people were selected and others ignored".

The president has pardoned numerous prominent figures over the past year, but critics have noted that more people have been arrested in the meantime. Since April last year, authorities have released 1,000

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British nurse guilty of killing seven babies

LONDON: A British nurse was found guilty Friday of murdering seven newborn babies and trying to kill six others at the hospital neonatal unit where she worked, becoming the UK's most prolific child killer. Lucy Letby, 33, had been on trial since October last year, accused of either injecting her sick or premature young victims with air, overfeeding them with milk or poisoning them with insulin.

The victims' families said in a joint statement read outside Manchester Crown Court in northern England said: "Justice has been served." But they cautioned: "This justice will not take away from the extreme hurt, anger and distress we

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Pearl diving trip winds up

Kuwaitis proud of legacy of the past



Pearls collected by a diver during the annual pearl diving festival.



Kuwaiti divers make their way to the beach during the annual pearl diving festival in Salmiya.



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban, Ambassador of the United Kingdom Belinda Lewis and Chairman of Kuwait Sea Sports Club Major General Fahad Al-Fahad attend the "Al-Qaffal" ceremony on Thursday, marking the end of the 32nd annual pearl diving heritage trip. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Family members wait for the return of traditional dhows on the shore.

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in the presence of Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban, British Ambassador Belinda Lewis and Chairman of Kuwait Sea Sports Club Major Gen Fahad Al-Fahad, the 32nd pearl diving trip concluded on Thursday with the "Al-Qaffal" ceremony.

The ceremony, organized by KSSC's maritime heritage committee, celebrated the end of the pearl diving season by witnessing the return of the dhows to the shore with art and traditional music. The Al-Qaffal ceremony saw the young divers opening the oysters to harvest pearls. The event was attended by the families of the divers who participated in the trip.

Aiban said the trip simulates the suffering experienced by the old generation and the conditions they faced during pearl diving trips. "It embodies the highest values and meanings derived from authentic national and marine heritage," he said. He said the event also provides an opportunity to relive the conditions our forefathers experienced to build this country and the horrors and difficulties they suffered to reach the position we are in today.

Aiban stressed the continuous royal sponsorship of this event shows the keenness of the leadership to revive Kuwait's heritage and highlight the values and struggles of previous generations so that the youth can draw lessons from them to become active in serving their country. "Today, you are captains and sailors on ships, and tomorrow, you will be captains sailing Kuwait and its institutions towards development and a prosperous future," he told the young divers.

Ambassador Lewis told Kuwait Times it is very important to be able to remember the rich heritage of Kuwait, particularly the maritime industry, which was the foundation of the economy in Kuwait. "It is really heartwarming to participate today by watching old-fashioned boats coming here and traditional crafts, as well as embracing the future, as Kuwait has not forgotten its past," she said.

Lewis spoke about the importance for the UK to participate in such ceremonies. "I think we will all stay connected through the sea. Both countries love sailing, discovering new places and fishing. Despite the UK not having a pearling industry, I think we appreciate the sense of adventure that we share between the two countries," she added.

KSSC Public Relations Manager Assad Abdullah said in a press statement the 32nd pearl diving trip was held under the patronage of HH the Amir of the



Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, from Aug 12 to 17 on two dhows donated by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with the participation 60 Kuwaiti youth including captains, assistants and sailors.

Abdullah said Kuwait, since its establishment, created its own marine industry. The focus of the

country was on the sea as a source of livelihood, such as pearling. "The main goal of this celebration is to draw an expressive picture of the extent of Kuwaiti youth's pride in the heritage of their fathers and grandfathers. The late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah called on KSSC in 1986 to organize such trips by maintaining traditional methods of



the past without adding any modern touches. Accordingly, care and attention was paid by late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which continues to this day," he added.

Relatives attending the ceremony expressed their pride for the divers, stressing the importance of these events to embrace Kuwait's heritage. They told Kuwait Times these events remind divers of the meaning of patience, experienced by our forefathers.

Contractors express 'lack of confidence'

KUWAIT: The government has received a report on economic affairs and development projects in Kuwait, as well as the migration of major international companies to neighboring Gulf markets, away from the Kuwaiti market. The report emphasizes that one of the primary reasons for this shift is the frequent resignation of the government, sometimes mere

months after its appointment. These resignations are eroding hopes for the recovery of the projects sector in Kuwait during the current year.

"The recurring government resignations deal another blow to the confidence of international contractors, who now perceive Kuwait as a location riddled with political issues that affect their participation in tenders," explained the report. The report also highlighted that political instability over recent years has significantly hindered Kuwait's ability to implement major infrastructure projects. Any government resignation or political threats in parliament have led to significant project delays.

"Given the unstable composition of the Cabinet and the numerous vacant leadership positions, publicly-owned companies are reluctant and often unable to make essential decisions required to advance major tenders and award contracts," the report added.

The report further suggests that projects with approved budgets are likely to stall, and even smaller agreements, such as maintenance contracts, are facing delays. These delays extend to vital projects that could reshape the country's future, generate employment opportunities, and promote economic diversification. "Everything will come to a standstill as

long as decision-making remains unclear, and many committees have yet to provide approvals."

Continuing in this vein, the report warns that the country's business activity will remain at an already low ebb, potentially causing significant harm to Kuwait's economy in the years ahead. Moreover, the report points out that major companies that have successfully won and executed large projects in Kuwait over the past decade have scaled down their presence in the country. They have redirected their focus toward other rapidly growing project markets in the region, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar.

Local

15 drug suspects arrested

Drugs, firearms, counterfeit money, alcohol seized



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced that officials from the criminal department and the General Department of Anti-Drug Trafficking have arrested 15 people of different nationalities who were found in possession of narcotics, psychotropic substances, alcohol bottles, firearms, and counterfeit money. The Ministry of Interior said in a press release issued by the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media that this comes as a continuation of

the Ministry's efforts to combat drugs, psychotropic substances, and intoxicants and to track down their smugglers. There were 10 separate incidents where illicit substances were confiscated. About 6.150 kilograms of various drugs, 763 psychotropic pills, 145 bottles of alcohol, two firearms, money from sale proceeds, and counterfeit money were seized. Upon interrogation, the defendants admitted that the seized substances and items belonged to them.

The security forces are continuing to crack down on drug dealers to protect and preserve society from these dangerous drugs, underscoring the need for concerted efforts to eliminate drug-banned substances. It urged everyone to cooperate with the security men and report any negative phenomena to the emergency phone number 112 and the hotline of the General Department of Anti-Drug Trafficking at 1884141. — KUNA

Indian naval ship in Kuwait to enhance maritime ties

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Indian naval ship INS Visakhapatnam arrived at Shuwaikh Port on an operational turnaround visit on Saturday. The visit of the ship adds a new chapter to the bilateral navy-to-navy cooperation between India and Kuwait, a press release issued by the Indian Embassy said. The ship was accorded a warm welcome on arrival by Kuwait's senior naval officials, Kuwait border guards and Indian embassy officials. As the flagship of Indian Western Fleet docked at the port, Indian school students greeted it enthusiastically by waving Indian flags. Rear Admiral Vineet S McCarty, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, is also onboard the ship.

The ship's visit is in continuation of the increased maritime cooperation witnessed during 2021 when five Indian naval ships visited Kuwait for transporting liquid medical oxygen. It was followed by a visit of INS TEG in July 2022 and three ships from First Training Squadron having a port of call in Kuwait in October 2022. During its three-day port of call, various professional and training interactions are planned with Kuwait naval forces. The ship will also be kept open for visit by Indian citizens and schoolchildren, besides hosting various cultural activities. A passing exercise will also be conducted jointly with Kuwait Navy on Aug 22.

The visit of INS Visakhapatnam to Kuwait is a testimony of the historic maritime partnership which has contributed towards building the strong India-Kuwait partnership, the release added. The visit highlights Indian Navy's commitment to establishing cooperative partnerships with friendly countries, particularly in the Indian Ocean region, to combat maritime challenges together. During the visit, Indian naval officials are expected to undertake professional interactions with Kuwait naval officials on various aspects of maritime operations and share best practices aimed at enhancing defense cooperation between the two navies.

As part of the wider Gulf visit, INS Visakhapatnam visited Oman on July 30 to strengthen the maritime cooperation between the Indian Navy and Royal Oman Navy. The ship, along with another naval frontline platform, INS Trikand, visited Dubai's Port Rashid on Aug 9. INS Visakhapatnam is the lead ship and the first of the Visakhapatnam class stealth-guided missile destroyers. Built indigenously by Mazagon



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika poses for a photo with the captain and naval officers on board INS Visakhapatnam on Saturday.



Indian Ambassador greets Indian naval officers.

Dock Limited, the ship was commissioned on Nov 21, 2021 and is one of the largest destroyers in service with Indian Navy.

The Visakhapatnam-class destroyers, also classified as the P-15 Bravo class, or simply P-15B, is a class of guided-missile destroyers currently being built for the Indian Navy. The ship is an upgraded derivative of its predecessor, the Kolkata class, with im-

proved features of stealth, automation and ordnance. Designed by the Warship Design Bureau (WDB), a total of four ships are being built by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), under the 'Make in India' initiative. This 164m ship is fitted with the most advanced state-of-the-art navigation and communication equipment, sensors, radars and electronic warfare capability. The ship is equipped to carry two helicopters.



Indian students greet INS Visakhapatnam on arrival at Shuwaikh Port on Saturday.

News in Brief

Embassies caution Kuwaitis

KUWAIT: Kuwait Consulate General in Los Angeles has appealed to Kuwaiti citizens present in southern California, western Arizona and Nevada, to take precautions vis-a-vis an incoming hurricane. The consulate, according to a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday, urged the Kuwaiti citizens in these American regions to follow up on local authorities' instructions as a precaution against the hurricane, Hilary, expected to make landfall on Sunday and Monday. The consulate also urged the Kuwaitis to contact it on the phone number: 13102793644+. Meanwhile, the Embassy of Kuwait in Canada called on Kuwaiti citizens living in areas affected by forest fires in western Canada, specifically the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, to take caution and stay away from the fires. A statement from the embassy called for adherence to the instructions of the local authorities and the need to communicate with them in case of emergency via phone number (+1 6135136576). — KUNA

Fishermen union appeals

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Federation of Fishermen has appealed to the Minister of Finance over the ongoing diesel shortage, explaining that the Shamlan and Fahaeel stations have run out of diesel. The union reiterated the need to return the fishermen's quota to what it was before. It said: "The subsidy committee in the Ministry of Finance did not listen to the appeals of the fishermen's union to return the diesel monthly quota as it was in the previous season. Kuwaiti fishermen may not be able to go out to fish due to the lack of fuel," it said, rejecting accusations of strike or unwillingness to go out to fish. He pointed out that the union made it clear last July that the share of gasoline reduced to half would not be enough. "We have pleaded everywhere, but unfortunately, we were not met with a good response," the union stressed.

Diesel thieves nabbed

KUWAIT: Security officials from the criminal security department and the Farwaniya Governorate Investigation Department have arrested two people who are accused of selling state-subsidized diesel to a number of truck drivers in the Subhan and Amghara areas. Two tanks with 3,000 liters of diesel were seized, the public relations and security media at the interior ministry said. The defendants are under investigation.

MoI cautions over weather

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior and the General Fire Force called on citizens and residents to exercise caution due to the unstable weather conditions witnessed in the country, as issued by the Meteorological Department. The Interior Ministry said in a statement that everyone should not hesitate, if necessary, to call the emergency phone (112) for any humanitarian, security, or traffic assistance and follow up on the weather situation continuously for safety reasons. The Kuwait Fire Force said in a similar statement that everyone should be careful due to the weather conditions and call for help when needed. — KUNA

Arabs call for solidarity

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament (AP), marking World Humanitarian Day, called on Saturday for boosting Arabs' solidarity for facing difficult challenges affecting the most vulnerable and the poorest. The parliament in a statement praised the honorary stances by some Arab States, supporting friendly and brotherly nations and aiding them in coping with repercussions of crises and catastrophes. The UN-designated international occasion falls on August 19 annually. It lauded Arab States' initiatives for relieving refugees and the afflicted worldwide and greeted humanitarian workers. — KUNA

Bahrain commends unique Kuwait ties

MANAMA: Assistant Undersecretary for Support and Initiatives at the Bahraini Ministry of Youth Affairs Saud Al-Hadi extolled on Friday the distinguished youth ties between his country and Kuwait. Al-Hadi made the remark while welcoming visiting Director General of the Kuwaiti Arab Planning Institute (API) Dr Bader Malallah, and an expert from API Faisal Al-Monawer.

During the meeting, Al-Hadi appreciated the keenness of API to open channels of communication with the Ministry of Youth Affairs to serve the strategies and objectives of the ministry and the institute alike. The meeting dealt with an explanation of API's objectives in supporting economic, social and youth development efforts in the Arab countries, preparing research and studies, providing advisory services and institutional support, encouraging entrepreneurship and holding developmental meetings.

Al-Hadi discussed with API's officials regarding ways of cooperation between both sides, and presented joint initiatives towards the youth. The ministry's strategy always seeks to create an ideal environment for discovering, refining and Society highlighting youth and emerging talents in various fields, Al-Hadi underscored.

Meanwhile, Dr Malallah acclaimed the great development witnessed by the youth movement in Bahrain and its achievement of outstanding achievements at all levels, stressing the keenness of API to cooperate with the Ministry of Youth Affairs to present multiple initiatives and programs that contribute to improving the skills of youth and supporting their projects and innovations. — KUNA

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher

YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 301
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 220
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Humanitarian work is 'one of Kuwait's main priorities'

KUWAIT: Humanitarian and relief work is one of the main priorities in Kuwait, which is known for its humanitarian initiatives in several regions of the world, said a senior official of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS). Deputy Chairman of KRCS Anwar Al-Hasawi made the remark to KUNA on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day, which falls on August 19. The volume, level, and nature of the aid provided by Kuwait and all its governmental and nongovernmental institutions confirm the importance of the role that the state contributes to in international humanitarian and relief work, he said.

Humanitarian work reduces the effects of disasters and crises while spreading the humanitarian message in times of conflict, which also provides opportunities to strengthen social ties between people and contributes to creating societies capable of facing challenges, he pointed out. Throughout the course of KRCS since 1966, the work has been based on humanitarian initiatives with the idea of benevolence, giving, providing assistance to the needy, meeting their basic needs, and completing development projects, which are the development goals of KRCS, Al-Hasawi explained.

KRCS, together with the international community and various state institutions, marks World Humanitarian Day in honor of the memory of humanitarian workers, commending the efforts undertaken by the United Nations and its humanitarian organizations in providing for the humanitarian needs of those who deserve it around the world. — KUNA



Kuwait marks World Humanitarian Day, pledges to support the needy

Gulf nation playing a leading role in humanitarian efforts worldwide



Kuwaitis carry out humanitarian projects to house, feed the needy throughout the world. — KUNA photos



Kuwaiti charities deliver basic food items to the needy at refugee camps.

KUWAIT: As the UN celebrates World Humanitarian Day on August 19, Kuwait marks the occasion by continuing to lend support to global humanitarian causes without showing signs of fatigue or tiredness. Since independence some 60 years ago, Kuwaitis have been known and continue to be people of a highly generous nature, providing assistance to all suffering from natural or man-made disasters. This year's theme for World Humanitarian Day 2023 is the Human Race, with the slogan "it takes a village" approved to display the necessity of cooperation amongst the people of the world.

The celebration is held on the 20th anniversary of the attack against the UN headquarters in Baghdad in 2003, where several casualties occurred during this sorrowful event. Speaking on the global celebration, the Director General of the Direct Aid Society, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sumait, told KUNA that it was important to support humanitarian causes worldwide to provide a helping hand to those less fortunate.

He noted that the Direct Aid Society had set up a humanitarian strategy to counter poverty, ignorance, and disease in impoverished societies and isolate regions in some 30 African countries and Yemen. He revealed that the society operated various programs in 745 African villages, benefiting over three million individuals in accordance with statistics issued in 2017-23. Some 88,000 orphans, 18,000 development projects, 26,000 wells, and 6,303 mosques, in addition to 335 schools, four universities, and six hospitals, were all under the supervision of the Direct Aid Society in Africa, Al-Sumait revealed in regards to the tremendous role they play in the content.

Similarly, Dr. Issa Al-Dhafiri — Director General of the International Rahma (Mercy) Society — indicated that since its establishment some 41 years ago, the society had made its mission to help all those in need worldwide. He revealed that the society provided a helping hand to 45 nations in Asia, Africa, and Europe, as well as Arab countries, through partnerships with regional and international entities. From building schools, Islamic centers, technical academies, and more, the society has provided 835 projects and programs in this regard, he added.

Al-Dhafiri said that the society also dug and



Kuwaiti charities establish health centers to treat low-income earners.

operated 166 wells in several countries, adding that such work was in line with the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also affirmed that the society had been recognized for its efforts, earning 16 wards both locally and internationally. Also providing his input, the CEO of Namaa (development) charity, Saad Al-Otaibi, said that World Humanitarian Day was an annual occasion to remember those in need.

In regards to the work the charity was contributing, Al-Otaibi said that they had projects in 24 countries, revealing that in 2022, for example, the charity had provided assistance to 14 countries, building mosques, Islamic and Quranic centers, wells, and orphanages in addition to providing media assistance and surgeries. He said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs had contributed to the charity's efforts, taking the chance to thank the state entities for their contributions.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Najat Charitable Society, Rashid Al-Hamad, affirmed that Kuwait has a leading role in humanitarian efforts worldwide. Since its establishment in 1978, the society has contributed to projects benefiting over 10 million individuals



globally. He said that 137,000 orphans were sponsored by the society in terms of their education, adding that over 35,000 wells were dug by the society throughout the world in addition to food programs aimed at battling hunger and thirst. Whether on the individualistic, institutional, or governmental levels, Kuwait has always been on the vanguard of humanitarian issues, said Al-Rashid, affirming that no creed, nationality, or color would prevent Al-Najat society from lending a helping hand. — KUNA



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The IICO personnel visit refugee camps to deliver basic materials. — KUNA photos

Charities urged to coordinate, tackle mounting challenges

KUWAIT: Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organization and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General, Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq, has affirmed that mounting humanitarian crises and catastrophes worldwide should prompt coordination among charities to cope with their ramifications. Dr. Al-Maatouq said in an interview with KUNA that relief foundations have been bearing increasing responsibilities to deal with humanitarian disasters and crises, noting their profound role in coping with the repercussions of natural catastrophes throughout the globe.

The organization, last year, offered relief and development services to 58 countries at a total



The International Islamic Charitable Organization distributes food to the needy across the world.



Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq

cost of approximately KD 15 million, he said. However, the Kuwaiti charities at the end of the past year and early this year faced huge challenges due to increasing natural disasters such as the destructive floods in Pakistan and the deadly earthquakes that happened in Turkey and Syria, Dr. Al-Maatouq added.

The IICO, in collaboration with other philanthropic entities, had taken part in a relief campaign for Pakistan, raising some two million dollars to offer urgent aid to the afflicted. As to the quake in Turkey and Syria, the organization allotted \$2.160 million worth of aid for the victims. — KUNA





Venezuelans struggle to find power, water amid shortage

Russians who fled mobilization return home despite draft threat

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'Heinous' Russian attack on Ukraine kills 7

Putin meets top generals in rare trip

CHERNIHIV: A Russian missile strike on Ukraine's northern city of Chernihiv killed seven people and wounded more than 100 on Saturday, in what the UN called a "heinous" attack hours after President Vladimir Putin met Moscow's top army commanders. "It is heinous to attack the main square of a large city, in the morning, while people are out walking, some going to church to celebrate a religious day for many Ukrainians," said Denise Brown, the UN's humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine.

She was referring to the Orthodox holiday of the Transfiguration of the Lord which saw some in Chernihiv attending church services in the morning. "I condemn this repeated pattern of Russian strikes on populated areas of Ukraine ... Attacks directed against civilians or civilian objects are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law," she added.

Chernihiv, 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Kyiv towards Belarus, has been largely spared from major attacks since the first months of Russia's invasion as fierce fighting rages in the east and south. The Russian army marched through the city when it invaded Ukraine through Belarus in February 2022, before being repelled by Kyiv's forces. Saturday's strike came after Putin held talks with top Russian generals in a rare trip to operational hub Rostov-on-Don and as his Ukrainian nemesis, Volodymyr Zelensky, visited Sweden for talks with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson.

"As of 3:25 pm (12:25 GMT), 117 people were injured in the terrorist attack on the center of Chernihiv, seven of them died," Oleksandr Lomako, Chernihiv's acting mayor, said on Telegram. Viacheslav Chaus, head of the Chernihiv region's military administration, said on Telegram that a child was among the dead. Zelensky said the attack hit a square that houses a "polytechnic university, a theatre".



CHERNIHIV: A local resident stands next to a damaged car at the site of a missile strike in Chernihiv, on August 19, 2023.— AFP

"An ordinary Saturday, which Russia turned into a day of pain and loss," he said after his arrival in Sweden. AFP reporters saw fire trucks outside the Taras Shevchenko Drama Theatre and Music Academy, which suffered some damage. "There was smoke, screams, people were running, crying, moaning. We ran to the shelter when everything happened and sat there," Iryna, a 24-year-old bartender in Chernihiv, told AFP. "I'm still a little in shock, because this hasn't happened in a long time, everyone has relaxed a little. But now we will probably be going down to the shelter."

Ukraine's culture ministry said the center of Chernihiv, a city with a thou-

sand-year history, is a candidate for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. "Russia, as a terrorist country, is systematically destroying Ukraine's cultural heritage," it added in a statement.

Hours earlier, the Kremlin said Putin had travelled to the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don, Moscow's hub for its operations in Ukraine, to meet his top generals in a rare trip close to combat zones. Moscow gave no details of when the meeting took place, but footage released by state media indicated it was at night. Putin "listened to briefings by the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov, commanders of directions and other senior

officers of the group", the Kremlin said. A video published by the RIA Novosti news agency showed Putin, wearing a suit, stepping out of a jeep in the dark and being greeted with a handshake by Gerasimov, in military attire. Gerasimov is seen leading Putin down a corridor decorated with portraits of Russian military men and of the president chairing a meeting with army chiefs. Rostov-on-Don was also the scene of a dramatic armed mutiny by Wagner mercenaries in June, which saw them briefly take over the army HQ in Rostov, before halting their rebellion. Gerasimov, who Wagner wanted to unseat, has rarely been seen in public since.— AFP

Indian colleges told to suicide-proof rooms after deaths

NEW DELHI: A spate of student suicides in an Indian city has prompted local authorities to order that college hostels be refitted to prevent pupils hanging themselves from ceiling fans. The town of Kota, on the edge of the desert in Rajasthan state, is a hub of private coaching institutes catering to youngsters hoping for entrance into some of the country's most prestigious medical and engineering schools. But the city has gained an unfortunate reputation after numerous student suicides, with India's junior education minister quizzed on the deaths in parliament last month.

On Thursday the Kota district administration responded by ordering student accommodation businesses to remount bedroom ceiling fans in a way that would not support a human's weight. "To prevent suicides from increasing among coaching students in Kota city, all hostel and private guesthouse operators in the state are directed to install a security spring device in the fans at every room," the order read.

At least 150,000 students from around the country are enrolled at more than 300 private colleges in Kota, according to media reports. The city has reported around two dozen student suicides so far this year, up from 15 for all of 2022. India's overall statistics on suicide are patchy. The country saw more than 164,000 suicide deaths in 2021, the latest year for which figures were available, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

Students accounted for eight percent of those deaths, with failing examinations listed as one of the common reasons. Subhas Sarkar, India's deputy education minister, told parliament in July that the government had implemented policies to help youngsters with the "stress and emotional adjustments" of student life. Sarkar said higher education institutions were also working to improve student "happiness and wellness", including by running regular yoga sessions.— AFP

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International

Russians who fled mobilization return home despite draft threat

Returnees prepared for dodging deployment once more if financially able

MOSCOW: Ivan Nesterov, a well-built fitness trainer, came back to Russia six months after fleeing the mobilization that propped up Russian forces fighting in Ukraine last fall. Like Nesterov, some of the hundreds of thousands of Russian men who left the country to avoid being sent to the front lines have returned, despite the lingering threat of a new draft. "When I landed back in Moscow, I felt incredibly relieved, no matter what the consequences might be," the 35-year-old told AFP. He left a few days after the Kremlin announced a mobilization in September last year, "feeling a mix of emotions including panic".

As flights out of Russia quickly sold out, he found a seat on a plane to the Ural Mountains before taking a bus to Siberia and driving to Kazakhstan. Like the other former Soviet republics that Russians can enter without a visa, Kazakhstan saw a massive influx of Russian men after mobilization was announced. When Nesterov finally crossed the border into Kazakhstan, "the very first emotion was: freedom. I can say openly anything that I think and I will not be imprisoned for it," he remembered thinking. Nesterov, who never dared to join an opposition demonstration

or write critical posts on social media, saw his departure as an alternative way to protest. "I wanted to finally break away from the system," he said.

While he was in exile, his older sister was detained by the police for wearing a yellow hat and blue scarf — the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Accused of resisting police orders, she left Russia to avoid falling victim to the repression that has accelerated since the beginning of the conflict. Nesterov, meanwhile, settled in the northern Kazakh city of Kostanay, where he quickly found work at a boxing club. "They didn't even ask for my diploma," he said, surprised.

But after a short-lived euphoria, Nesterov fell into a deep depression. "I was missing my homeland. My friends, the places that were dear to me ... It was very hard psychologically. I didn't want to work anymore. I earned four times less," he explained. He decided to come back to Russia at the beginning of April. "Financial difficulties and family ties pushed (exiles) to come back," independent political expert Konstantin Kalachev told AFP.

The Russian defense ministry said in October 2022 that the mobilization of 300,000 men had been completed.

Unwilling to announce a second mobilization drive, authorities have instead opted for a massive PR campaign to attract volunteers. "Those who came back believe that the risk (of being mobilized) had gone down," said Kalachev.

The number of returnees is difficult to assess because they remain discreet, in fear of another draft. The authorities have not issued a decree formally ending the first wave of mobilization. Reports on social media that Russian military offices are still calling men in to update their records have added to concerns.

In April, Russia made it possible to deliver conscription papers online — making it more difficult to dodge the draft in the future. Given the constant threat of mobilization, Kalachev said, many of the exiles who have returned to Russia "are ready to leave at any time", if "their financial resources allow them to do so". Nesterov considered leaving again after hearing rumors another mobilization could be announced after the regional elections scheduled in September. "I see that new laws are being passed, that the country is closing off," he said. "It's like a friend says: better be a coward and alive, than brave and dead." — AFP



MOSCOW: Ivan Nesterov, a 35-year-old kinesiologist and fitness trainer who fled Russia in late September 2022 to avoid mobilization and returned in April 2023, poses in Moscow on August 8, 2023. — AFP

West African delegation arrives in coup-hit Niger

NIAMEY: A delegation from West African bloc ECOWAS arrived in Niger on Saturday for talks with the military officers who have seized power, sources close to the organization and ousted President Mohamed Bazoum told AFP. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has agreed to activate a "standby force" as a last resort to restore democracy in Niger after generals toppled and detained Bazoum on July 26.

But it says it favors dialogue to defuse the crisis. A plane carrying the delegation landed in the capital Niamey at around 1:00 pm (12:00 GMT), a day after the bloc's military chiefs said they were ready to intervene to reinstate Bazoum. Niger's governing military council confirmed the arrival of the ECOWAS representatives, headed by former Nigerian leader Abdulsalam Abubakar.

A previous ECOWAS delegation led by Abubakar earlier this month tried and failed to meet Bazoum and the coup leader, General Abdourahmane Tiani. A source close to the latest delegation said it would send "a message of firmness" to the army officers and meet Bazoum. ECOWAS defense chiefs met this week in the Ghanaian capital Accra to fine-tune details of a potential military operation to restore Bazoum if ongoing negotiations with coup leaders fail.

"We are ready to go any time the order is given," Abdel-Fatau Musah, an ECOWAS commissioner for political affairs and security said on Friday after the military chiefs' meeting. "The D-Day is also decided." ECOWAS leaders say they must act after Niger became the fourth West African nation since 2020 to suffer a coup, following Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

The Sahel region is struggling with growing jihadist insurgencies linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group. Frustration over the violence has in part prompted the military takeovers. ECOWAS troops have intervened in other emergencies since 1990, including civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ivory Coast, Benin and Nigeria are expected to contribute troops to a Niger mission. — AFP



NIAMEY: Volunteers gather near General Seyni Kountche Stadium in Niamey on August 19, 2023, responding to the call from several organizations to be registered as civilian auxiliaries to potentially mobilize in support of the armed forces. — AFP

Two Zionists killed in West Bank shooting

RAMALLAH: Two Zionists were killed in a suspected shooting in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, the army and

medics said. "A suspected shooting attack was carried out at a number of (Zionist) civilians in the area of the town of Huwara," an army statement said, adding that two civilians had been killed.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that the army had closed key entrances to the main northern West Bank city of Nablus, and that soldiers were forcing businesses to close as they searched for the suspected at-

tackers. Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou said the attack was the "result of the resistance's continuous promise to defend our people and respond to the crimes of the occupation."

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since early last year, with a string of attacks by Palestinians on Zionist targets, repeated Zionist army raids and violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinian communities. Earlier Saturday, a

Palestinian died from wounds sustained during a Zionist raid on the Balata refugee camp near Nablus earlier this week. On Thursday, Zionist troops killed a Palestinian militant during a raid in Jenin, also in the northern West Bank.

Human rights groups B'Tselem and Peace Now said the settler violence that followed a February attack in which two settlers were killed amounted to a "pogrom". The army said the settlers

had carried out "actions of terrorism". At least 218 Palestinians have been killed in violence linked to the Zionist occupation this year.

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is home to nearly three million Palestinians and around 490,000 Zionists who live in settlements considered illegal under international law. — AFP



KELOWNA, Canada: The McDougall Creek wildfire burns in the hills in British Columbia on Aug 17, 2023. — AFP

Thousands flee raging wildfires...

Continued from Page 1

Blazes have already destroyed several properties in West Kelowna, separated by Okanagan Lake from its larger, eponymous neighbor. Among them is the Lake Okanagan Resort, according to local media, which is known for having hosted high-profile politicians such as British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

Overall, the number of people under evacuation order in British Columbia was 15,000, Emergency Management Minister Bowinn Ma said, according to Canadian media. Thousands in the area were ordered evacuated or told late Thursday to be ready to leave at a moment's notice, while those on the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus were ordered Friday to leave "immediately."

Officials described firefighters in the Kelowna area as being forced to pull back, with some becoming trapped behind lines while making "heroic efforts" to rescue area residents. "We fought hard last night to protect our community," local fire chief Jason Brolund told a briefing on Friday. The blazes have caused "terrible loss," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters after meeting evacuees from Yellowknife as they arrived in Edmonton, Alberta, with no idea when they may return home.

Egypt activist Douma freed...

Continued from Page 1

political prisoners, but detained almost 3,000 more, according to Egyptian rights monitors. In July, Sisi pardoned researcher Patrick Zaki a day after he received a three-year sentence, as well as rights lawyer Mohamed Al-Baqer, who was arrested in 2019 while attending an interrogation of Abdel Fattah, his client at the time.

Of the 19,000 who fled Yellowknife, "over 15,000 traveled out by road and 3,800 have been airlifted, with approximately 1,000 essential staff remaining in the city and surrounding area," environmental minister Thompson posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. Those crews were remaining to erect defenses from the flames, while water bombers have been seen flying low over the city, with the Canadian military also helping out.

Several towns and Indigenous communities were evacuated earlier. The flight from Yellowknife means half the population of the near-Arctic territory has been displaced. Martha Kanatsiak, who has lived in Yellowknife for 28 years, arrived late Friday in the Alberta metropolis of Calgary. "I'm okay, but I feel sad and depressed and worried. I never saw something like this," the 59-year-old Inuit retiree told AFP.

Some 40 flights carrying around 3,500 passengers from Yellowknife have arrived in Calgary, said officials in the city, which has made nearly 500 hotel rooms available. Canada is experiencing a record-setting wildfire season, with official estimates of over 14.0 million hectares already burned — almost twice the area of the last record of 7.3 million hectares. Four people have died so far. In addition, the fires have emitted an unprecedented amount of carbon dioxide. Scientists say human-caused global warming is exacerbating natural hazards, making them both more frequent and more deadly. — AFP

The pardons come as Egypt conducts a so-called "national dialogue" meant to bring in an opposition that has been decimated during the decade of repression since Sisi came to power. The president announced on Wednesday he had received the first recommendations of this "dialogue", saying he had "passed them on to the competent authorities so that they can be applied within the framework granted by the legal and constitutional provisions". Next year, Egypt goes to the polls for a presidential election in which Sisi is widely expected to seek a new term. — AFP

Saudi Crown Prince accepts...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah applauded the visit by Amir-Abdollahiah to Saudi Arabia and the meeting with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal. The visit reflects the two countries' keenness on re-

storing normal bilateral relations and their commitment to preserve the region's security and stability, Sheikh Salem said. He noted China's role in mending fences between Tehran and Riyadh, with its recent hosting of bilateral talks that had led to the resumption of diplomatic relations on the basis of good neighborliness, non-intervention in other states' domestic affairs, boosting relations and establishing cooperation. Sheikh Salem also indicated at the positive impact of such rapprochement on regional countries with respect to stability, peace and prosperity. — Agencies

British nurse guilty of killing...

Continued from Page 1

have all had." The jury, some of whom were in tears after they were discharged, deliberated for 22 days, returning their first guilty decisions on Aug 8, which could not be reported until Friday because of a court order.

Letby fought back tears in the dock after the initial verdicts were read out. She was not in court Friday to hear the jurors' final determinations. They eventually acquitted her of two counts, and could not reach decisions on six others. Prosecutors have asked for 28 days to consider whether to seek a retrial on those charges.

Letby will be sentenced on Monday and has reportedly told her lawyers she will not attend court to hear her fate but she faces the prospect of never being released from prison. The nurse was arrested following a string of deaths at the neonatal unit of the Countess of Chester Hospital in northwest England between June 2015 and June 2016. Described by the prosecution as a "calculating" woman who used methods of killing that "didn't leave much of a trace", Letby had repeatedly denied harming the children.

"Time and again, she harmed babies, in an environment which should have been safe for them and their families," said senior prosecutor Pascale Jones, calling the killings "a complete betrayal of the trust placed in her". The court was told that colleagues raised concerns after noticing that Letby was on shift when each of the babies collapsed, with some of the newborns attacked just as their parents left their cots. The prosecution said Letby "gaslighted" her colleagues into believing the string of deaths were "just a run of bad luck".

Letby's final victims were two triplet boys, referred to in court as babies O and P. Child O died shortly after Letby returned from a holiday in Ibiza in June 2016, while child P died a day after their sibling. Letby was also said to have attacked another baby boy, child Q, shortly after but the jury was unable to reach a verdict on the charge.

Prosecutors said by that time Letby was "com-

pletely out of control", adding that "she was in effect playing God". Letby was arrested and released twice. On her third arrest in 2020 she was formally charged and held in custody. During searches at her home, police found hospital paperwork and a handwritten note on which Letby had written: "I am evil, I did this."

Letby later tried to explain the note by saying she wrote it after being placed on clerical duties following the death of the two triplets.

Defense lawyer Ben Myers told the court Letby was "hardworking, deeply committed" and "loved her work". Letby also suggested that a "gang" of four senior doctors pinned blame on her to cover for the hospital's failings. When she gave evidence at the trial, she insisted she "always wanted to work with children" and said it was "devastating" to find out she was blamed for the deaths.

Police are investigating Letby's entire tenure at the Countess of Chester and at the Liverpool Women's Hospital where she also previously worked, sifting through more than 4,000 neo-natal unit admissions between 2012 and 2016. Nigel Scawn, medical director at the Countess of Chester, said the case had a "profound impact" on the hospital's patients but "significant changes" have been made since Letby worked there.

The government meanwhile announced an independent inquiry into Letby's case, and will look at how concerns by clinicians were dealt with by hospital management. UK Health Secretary Steve Barclay said it would help the victims' parents and families "get the answers they need" and "help... identify where and how patient safety standards failed to be met".

Her case revived memories of two of Britain's infamous medical murderers, doctor Harold Shipman and nurse Beverley Allitt. Shipman, a general practitioner, hanged himself in prison in 2004, four years after being convicted of killing 15 of his patients. A later public inquiry concluded he killed about 250 patients with lethal morphine injections between 1971 and 1998. Allitt — a nurse dubbed the "angel of death" — was jailed for life in 1993 after being convicted of murdering four young children in her care, attempting to murder three others and other offences. — AFP

International

Venezuelans struggle to find power, water amid shortage

'I stop buying medicine to go buy gas'

CARACAS: Yusmary spends as much as half her weekly wage on water. Isora must go to the black market to get gas cylinders so she can cook. Rodrigo, weary of blackouts, bought portable generators for his home and business. Public utilities offer erratic service in Venezuela, and citizens pay steeply to make up for the shortcomings.

When power shuts off and water and gas supplies run dry, people hustle around chaotic private networks to find supplies. "People have to resolve and go about their daily lives," Jesus Vasquez, director of Monitor Ciudad, an NGO that tracks water, electricity and gas in Caracas and four states in this country of 30 million inhabitants, told AFP. Protests over the situation are frequent.

Empty water pipes

A shout rings out in La Jota, part of the La Vega district of Caracas: "The water is back on!" Everyone scurries to fill buckets and jugs to ensure family water supplies. Yusmary Gomez, a 36-year-old mother, says it is not uncommon that water comes on only once every two weeks. "Last year, we didn't get even a drop of water for three and a half months."

At her home, she has a plastic cistern that holds 800 liters (210 gallons) given to her during an election campaign. City water, when it arrives, is often yellowish, so she buys 20-liter jugs from the store where

she works, for drinking and cooking. Each pay day, her boss deducts the cost. Filling two containers costs one dollar. "I get \$30 a week and I've been paid \$15," Yusmary tells AFP. Monitor Ciudad estimates that city residents on average receive water for 60 of the 168 hours in any given week.

For middle class residents, it is common to pay \$70 for a delivery from a tanker to fill private cisterns. In more affluent areas, neighbors sometimes spend up to \$20,000 to drill private wells and share the output. The average salary in the country, according to private estimates, is US\$150 per month. The minimum wage is less than \$5. Using a mobile app, communities can notify the government of President Nicolas Maduro, and in theory it deploys units to replenish water lines, pave roads or recondition schools. Maduro blames US sanctions on his government for the crisis in services, exacerbated by disinvestment and allegations of corruption.

Gas for medicine

Water isn't the only scarcity in La Jota. Isora Bazan complains of erratic delivery of domestic gas cylinders for cooking. To cope with the delays, she must turn to the black market. "I stop buying medicine to go buy gas," the 61-year-old retiree tells AFP. On one avenue, dealers sell cylinders for between \$10 and \$20. Isora receives a monthly pension of less than

US\$5. Only 17 percent of the population has piped gas, according to Monitor Ciudad.

Private generators

Felicinda Mendoza, 74, saw her refrigerator fail from frequent blackouts. "The power goes out a lot ... Yesterday I took out the meat, the chicken, the little bit of food I had. Everything was rotten," she says. Blackouts are especially problematic in the provinces, where they can last for hours. "If we don't find a way to solve these things, we will die of heart attacks," Rodrigo Crespo, a 35-year-old businessman, tells AFP. He bought two small generators, one for his home and one for his business in Los Puertos de Altigracia, a small town near Maracaibo in the west of the country. Each generator cost \$350. Running them costs \$100 a month in fuel.

No water, no school

The collapse in the public health and educational systems also vexes people. The four-year-old daughter of Yusmary often misses classes when her state-run preschool shuts its doors for lack of water. "They send us a text message: There's no water so there's no school," she says. Since the coronavirus pandemic, it has become commonplace for students in public schools to have classes only two or three days a week as teachers retire due to low salaries. — AFP



CARACAS: Yusmary Gomez, 36, holds a hose to collect water in plastic containers due to water shortage, at her home in La Vega neighborhood in Caracas, on August 9, 2023. — AFP

Over 2,400 killed in Haiti gang violence in 2023

GENEVA: More than 2,400 people have been killed in Haiti since the start of 2023 amid rampant gang violence, including hundreds killed in lynchings by vigilante mobs, the UN said Friday. The toll comes as clashes in Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince this week left 30 residents dead and more than a dozen wounded. "Between January 1 and August 15 of this year, at least 2,439 people have been killed and a further 902 injured," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva. In addition, she said, "951 people have been kidnapped" during the same period.

As anger grows, Shamdasani warns that a rise in popular justice movements and self-defense groups was fueling the fire. "Since April 24 up to mid-August, more than 350 people have been lynched by local people and vigilante groups," she said, adding that of those, 310 were alleged gang members and one was a police officer. The remainder were members of the public.

Houses in Port-au-Prince's Carrefour-Feuilles neighborhood were set on fire in the attacks and two police officers also died, according to a provisional toll provided to AFP by the National Human Rights Defense Network. The neighborhood is a strategic area for the gangs, which control about 80 percent of Haiti's capital. More than 5,000 people have fled their homes, authorities said. Violent crimes include kidnappings for ransom, carjackings, rapes and armed thefts.

"Reports from Haiti this week have underscored the extreme brutality of the violence being inflicted on the population and the impact that it is having on their human rights," Shamdasani said. In the face of the violence, UN rights chief Volker Turk called for urgent action to be taken on an appeal for a non-UN multinational force to be sent in "to support the Haitian police in addressing the grave security situation and restoring the rule of law." "The human rights of the Haitian people must be protected and their suffering alleviated," Turk said.

At the end of July, Kenya announced it was ready to lead a multinational force and deploy 1,000 police "to help train and help the Haitian police restore normality in the country". Haiti has been mired for years in intertwining economic, security and political crises. The assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021 has dramatically worsened the situation, with gangs taking an increasingly strong hold. The head of the Haitian National Human Rights Defense Network said that the population had been "left to fend for itself". "The national police is dysfunctional and is facing leadership problems," said Pierre Esperance, criticizing the "highest level connivance" with the crime gangs. "The Haitian police cannot solve the problem of insecurity because it is part of insecurity," he said, noting that the crisis cannot be tackled "without tackling the problems of governance, the absence of the rule of law, impunity and political instability". — AFP



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Residents evacuate the Carrefour Feuilles commune in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on August 15, 2023, as gang violence continues to plague the Haitian capital. — AFP



QUITO: This aerial view shows downtown Quito on August 15, 2023. — AFP

Ecuador: From Darwin to drug trafficking

QUITO: Ecuador will hold a presidential election Sunday after a campaign marked by the murder of a top candidate and vows to tackle the lawlessness that has engulfed the once-peaceful nation. President Guillermo Lasso called the snap election after he dissolved the opposition-dominated Congress in May to avoid an impeachment trial just two years after his election.

There are eight candidates in the running, with a runoff scheduled for October 15 if no one wins outright. The new president will take office on October 26, and will only serve for a year and a half. Ecuador's election race has been thrown wide open after the assassination of serious contender Fernando Villavicencio, whose last-minute replacement, a journalist, will face off against a leftist lawyer and a right-wing former sniper nicknamed "Rambo."

The campaign has been marked by pledges to tackle the lawlessness that has engulfed the once-peaceful South American nation. "These are completely atypical elections, in a situation basically of horror that Ecuador is going through ... due to the existing violence, but which manifested itself in a more acute and atrocious way" with Villavicencio's murder, political scientist Anamaria Correa Crespo told AFP.

Soldiers have been deployed across the country to secure the vote, which begins at 7:00 am local time (12:00 GMT) and closes at 5:00 pm (22:00 GMT). Initial results are expected to trickle in the same night, with ten days for a final tally to be announced. Here are five things to know about the South American country:

New narcotrafficking hub

In the last few years, Ecuador has become a key player in the regional cocaine trade as drug trafficking from Colombia and Peru expands into the Andean country, taking advantage of lax security in ports on its Pacific coast. The drug trade has spurred a wave of horrific violence, making security the top concern of voters. Ecuador's murder rate since 2018 has quadrupled, kidnappings are rife, and a string of clashes between rival drug gangs has claimed at least 430 lives in Ecuadorian prisons since 2021, leaving a trail of dismembered and burned bodies.

Indigenous power

Ecuador's more than one million Indigenous people have developed powerful representation that played a key role in the downfall of three presidents between 1997 and 2005. In June 2022, the country was paralyzed by 18 days of Indigenous protests over the high cost of living and fuel prices in which six people died.

Three decades earlier, an Indigenous uprising forced the government to surrender more than two million hectares of land to Amazonian and Andean tribal groups. But while the constitution recognizes their ownership of the land, the state maintains control over everything under the soil. In the election Sunday, Ecuadorans will vote in a referendum to halt oil drilling in an Amazon reserve.

Assange protector

For seven years, the Ecuadoran embassy in London was at the center of the Julian Assange saga, offering asylum to the WikiLeaks founder pursued by the US for divulging military secrets about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in 2019 Ecuador's government — which shifted right after distancing itself from former Socialist president Rafael Correa — decided it had had enough of Assange and booted him out of the mission, accusing him of meddling in the politics of other states and being unhygienic, among other complaints. The Australian has since been in a high-security prison east of London, where he is fighting Britain's plans to extradite him to the United States.

Oil, bananas and prawns

One of the many ways drugs traffickers are getting their product out of the country is by smuggling it in one of Ecuador's top exports: bananas. The fruit is the country's third top export after oil some — \$13 billion per year — and shrimp, with Ecuador in 2020 overtaking India as the world's top exporter of the crustaceans.

Galapagos Islands

Ecuador is home to the famous Galapagos Islands, a marine-rich archipelago made up of 234 islands, inlets and rocks, with flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world. Observing its wonders in the 19th century, British scientist Charles Darwin developed his theory of evolution after studying finches and mockingbirds. The impact of human activity through climate change and mass tourism threatens the unique ecosystems on the islands, listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO. — AFP

What's in a name in Zimbabwe?

HARARE: Zimbabweans head to the polls next week with the opposition claiming the electoral register is riddled with irregularities, but what's not contested are some of the quirky names on those voter rolls. Some names certain to pop up on the register — which has not yet been made public — are Beatthem, Hardlife, Norest, Lovejoy, Hatred, Wisdom, Nomatter, Luckmore, Doubt, Thinkwell and Guarantee.

Zimbabweans have some of the most unusual names on the continent, most steeped in events around their birth or parents' personal experiences. Zimbabwean Pride Ndlovu, 32, a car-guard at a Johannesburg suburban shopping center in South Africa, said his parents would not reveal their secrets, but they hinted relations between them when his mother was pregnant, saw him named Pride. His sibling is named Happyson.

Another Zimbabwean expat working at a Johannesburg wine bar, Desire Ndlovu recalls a customer telling him he found it difficult to call him by his name in the presence of his wife. "My wife can't be calling you 'Desire' at 10 pm at night," he quoted the customer as saying. "It's one of those things," Ndlovu chuckled. There's no backstory to his name, but the 31-year-old Desire, a "passionate" wine consumer, admitted: "I love my name, I wouldn't have named myself better."

"In our culture, a name tells a whole story and the motivation to give a child a certain name can be a statement which the namer wants to make," Charles Pfukwa, a names expert and dean in the faculty of social sciences at Zimbabwe's Bindura University of Science Education, told AFP.

Hard Life

In the early years of independence, the joy brought by the end of British colonial rule saw Zimbabweans give their children names such as Freedom and Liberty. Then there are names associated with life's tribulations such as Godknows, Nomatter or Anyway. A father unsure about the paternity of a child would name the child Doubt, said Pfukwa.

Memory Chirere, a university of Zimbabwe English lecturer, may have taught hundreds of students in a career spanning more than three decades but some students remain etched in his mind for their funny names. "I remember students who had names like Comment, Eventhough, Fatness, Thinkwell, Atmosphere, Beathem, Guarantee, Domuch, Laughter, Attack and Agreement," he told AFP in Harare.

"During the first days both me and their fellow students found the names funny," said Chirere, and that annoyed those affected. But the student stands out. "You don't forget them. It helps you notice even their absence. You tend to give them more attention. You are also curious to know their parents and background and how they ended up having such names," said the lecturer.

Most names are influenced by the parents' social and cultural background as well as their convictions. Footballer Hardlife Zvirekwi told AFP that his parents were going through tough times when he was born. They had just moved to the capital Harare from their rural home. "Life was not easy in the city. My father who was a street vendor was struggling to make ends meet and when I was born life was hard, so my father called me Hardlife."

Misery Chivati changed her name to Mutsa (Shona for grace) after her third-grade schoolteacher explained its meaning. "I doubt that my parents knew the meaning of my name when my mother named me Misery," she said. — AFP

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Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2023

Gulf states bet on 'green' hydrogen

'Fuel of the future' to help ease climate crisis at a stroke



ABU DHABI: Employees stand at the Al Dhafra Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Independent Power Producer (IPP) project during a visit by the French economy minister on Jan 31, 2023. — AFP photos

DUBAI: After riding a fossil-fuel boom for decades, Gulf Arab states are eyeing "green" hydrogen as they try to transition their economies and ease the climate crisis at a stroke. Oil producers Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman are investing heavily in the climate-friendly fuel in a search for alternative revenues to crude and gas.

Green hydrogen, which is the hydrogen created when renewable energy electrolyses water, appears to solve many problems: it is low-polluting and has widespread potential uses, which could make it lucrative and planet-saving at the same time.

But the fuel, which currently makes up less than one percent of total hydrogen production, is not yet commercially viable and needs a major scaling-up of renewable energy sources — a process that could take years. Despite this, the Gulf monarchies sense an opportunity to remain major players in energy markets as oil revenues fall.

"Gulf states aim to lead the global hydrogen market," said Karim Elgendy, associate fellow at Britain's Chatham House think tank. "They see green hydrogen as critical to remain major energy powers, allowing them to continue their influence as fossil fuel demand declines."

Most hydrogen is produced from polluting fossil fuels, but green hydrogen is extracted from water using renewable energy such as wind, solar and hydropower. While fossil fuels create harmful greenhouse gases when they burn, hydrogen emits only water vapor. It is touted for potential use in high-polluting industries such as transport, shipping and steel.

'Export leaders'

Wielding its massive investment capital, oil-rich Saudi Arabia is constructing the world's largest green hydrogen plant at NEOM, the \$500 billion futuristic megacity being built on the Red Sea. The \$8.4-billion plant will integrate solar and wind energy to produce up to 600 tons of green hydrogen a day by the end of 2026, officials say.

In July the UAE, which will host the United Nations' COP28 climate conference this year, approved a hydrogen strategy that aims to make it one of the top 10 producers by 2031. "Hydrogen will be a critical fuel for the energy transition," said Hanan Balalaa, a senior official at the UAE's oil firm ADNOC, calling it a "natural extension" for the company.

"We believe hydrogen and its carrier fuels have



NEOM, Saudi Arabia: A handout picture provided by Saudi Arabia's NEOM shows the design plan for the 500-metre tall parallel structures, known collectively as The Line, in the heart of the projected Red Sea megacity NEOM.

great potential as new, low carbon fuels, that the UAE is well placed to capitalize" on, Balalaa told AFP.

But it is Oman, which lags Saudi Arabia and the UAE in fossil fuel production, that looks poised to lead the Gulf's clean hydrogen race. The sultanate is on track to become the sixth-largest exporter globally and the biggest in the Middle East by the end of the decade, the International Energy Agency said in a June report. Oman aims to produce at least one million tonnes of green hydrogen a year by 2030, and up to 8.5 million tons by 2050, "which would be greater than total hydrogen demand in Europe today", the IEA said. According to auditing firm Deloitte, Middle Eastern countries, primarily the Gulf, will lead global clean hydrogen trade in the short-term, exporting around half of their domestic production by 2030. By 2050, North Africa and Australia are projected to have the greatest potential, although Gulf states will remain "export leaders", the company said in a June report.

Hope or hype?

The investment in green hydrogen has not curbed expansion in oil and gas, with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia planning to grow their hydrocarbon

industries. Experts predict it could still take years before Gulf countries can produce green hydrogen at a cost competitive with fossil fuel-based alternatives. While the cost of renewable energy has fallen due to technological advances, green hydrogen cannot yet be produced at a profit.

"Gulf countries will focus on maximizing the sales of hydrocarbons as long as possible," said Aisha Al-Sarihi, a research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute. "It will take years of trial and error for green hydrogen to become a commercially traded commodity," the expert said, adding that it "can be the new fuel of the future" once the technology matures and costs fall.

Demand for hydrogen also remains unclear. But Gulf states are long-time energy suppliers of import-dependent Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea that plan to incorporate it in their decarbonization plans. Abdullah Al-Nuaimi, the UAE's former climate change minister, cautioned, however, that "the existing infrastructure for transporting hydrogen is not adequate and would require massive investment to modify". "The time required to overcome and solve the challenges facing hydrogen is too long," he said. — AFP

ABK to offer 500m shares to raise capital by 26.7%

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its readiness to initiate the subscription process to its capital increase by offering 500 million shares at a value of KD 100 million, following the approvals obtained from regulating authorities. Through the capital increase, ABK aims to strengthen its capital base in line with the requirements of the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Basel III accord capital adequacy requirements. Proceeds from the capital increase will be used to continue to provide customers with exceptional banking services, while developing and enhancing the Bank's operations in accordance with its corporate strategy.

The subscription will be available to shareholders registered in the Bank's shareholder register as of the Record Date on Thursday, 24 August, 2023, and holders of pre-emptive rights, i.e. three (3) trading days post the Cum Date on Monday, 21 August, 2023, in accordance with the standard T+3 settlement cycle. The subscription will begin on Sunday, 27 August, 2023, and will continue for 15 calendar days, until Sunday, 10 September, 2023 (inclusive and ending at 1 pm), with a subscription price of 200 fils per share (which includes a nominal value of 100 fils and an issuance premium of 100 fils).

ABK has appointed KAMCO Invest as the Lead Manager and Subscription Agent, and ABK Capital as the Joint Lead Manager and Subscription Agent. The prospectus and additional information related to the offering and subscription process are now available on the websites of ABK and the subscription agents. Eligible subscribers interested in subscribing to the capital increase may submit their subscription applications through Kuwait Clearing Company's on-



Talal Behbehani

line subscription platform www.ipo.com.kw during the subscription period. On this occasion, Talal Behbehani, Chairman of ABK, said, "The capital increase will strengthen the Bank's capital base and contribute to the development of our main business and activities, reinforcing our leading position in the Kuwaiti banking sector."

Behbehani added, "The capital increase will also assist us in developing our operations and introducing new banking solutions and products. Furthermore, it will contribute towards financing upcoming development projects in Kuwait." The Chairman anticipates a strong appetite for the subscription, especially given the high level of trust that the Bank enjoys from its existing investors, shareholders, and customers. He emphasized his active pursuit to continuously maximize shareholder value.

Behbehani commended the ongoing support that ABK receives from regulatory bodies, including the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Capital Markets Authority, Boursa Kuwait, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The new shares to be offered represent 26.7 percent of the current paid-up capital, raising ABK's share capital to KD 237.4 million following the completion of the transaction. The capital increase will bolster the Bank's financial position, increasing shareholders' equity by KD 100 million.

ABK achieved a net profit of KD 23.9 million at the end of the first half of 2023, representing a growth of 30 percent compared to KD 18.4 million during the first half of 2022. Meanwhile, Earnings per Share reached 11 fils, an increase of 38 percent compared to 8 fils during the same period of the previous year. This financial performance reflects the continuous improvement in key operational aspects, strong growth

China's new rules on AI-generated content

BEIJING: China put into force this week its newest regulations on artificial intelligence-generated content, a watered-down version of stricter draft rules that seek to keep the country in the AI race while maintaining firm censorship on online content.

Rapid advancements in generative AI have stoked global alarm over the technology's potential for disinformation and misuse, with deepfake images showing people mouthing things they never said. Chinese companies have rushed to develop artificial intelligence services that can mimic human speech since the release of San Francisco-based OpenAI's

ChatGPT, which is banned in the country. Experts say the 24 new rules appear to be diluted from strict draft regulations published earlier this year as Beijing seeks to encourage homegrown entrants to the US-dominated industry. Here's what you need to know about Beijing's regulations, which target services for the general public:

AI ethics

Generative AI must "adhere to the core values of socialism" and refrain from threatening national security and promoting terrorism, violence, or "ethnic hatred", according to the guidelines. Service providers must label AI-generated content as such, and take measures to prevent gender, age and racial discrimination when designing algorithms.

Their software should not create content that contains "false and harmful information". AI programs



ABK building

of its loan portfolio, a decrease in provisions and risks, a strong balance sheet, and stable liquidity levels that the ABK Group enjoys. Since its establishment in 1967, ABK has progressed to become one of the leading Kuwaiti banks in the region that offers a wide array of personal, corporate, and private banking products and services. ABK also provides a broad range of local, regional, and global investment solutions and services through its subsidiary, ABK Capital.

Across the region, the Bank offers individuals and corporates the convenience of comprehensive banking and financial services in the Egyptian market through ABK-Egypt's network of 44 branches.

This is in addition to ABK's three branches located in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the United Arab Emirates, servicing both Kuwaiti and Emirati individual and corporate clients.

must be trained on legally obtained data sources that do not infringe on others' intellectual property rights, and individuals must give consent before their personal information can be used in AI training.

Companies designing publicly available generative AI software must "take effective measures to prevent underage users from excessive reliance on or addiction to generative AI services", according to the rules published in July by Beijing's cyberspace watchdog. They must also establish mechanisms for the public to report inappropriate content, and promptly delete any illegal content.

Service providers must conduct security assessments and submit filings on their algorithms to the authorities if their software is judged to have an impact on "public opinion", the rules say—a step back from a stipulation in earlier draft rules that required security assessments for all public-facing programs. — AFP

Wet July dampens UK retail sales, spending outlook

LONDON: British retail sales fell more than expected in July, official data showed Friday, with poor weather blamed for the setback as the country tries to revive its flagging economy.

Retail sales volumes fell by 1.2 percent last month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said, worse than the 0.5 percent that economists had forecast. It followed sales climbing more than expected in June, off the back of warmer weather in that month and some competitive pricing as inflation slowly cools. The government will hope the latest data is a temporary blip, but analysts warned it may signal dented consumer confidence after more than a year of rising interest rates.

"Retail sales fell sharply in July as poor weather impacted most sectors," ONS deputy director for surveys and economic indicators Heather Bovill said. "It was a particularly bad month for supermarkets as the summer washout combined with the increased cost of living meant sluggish sales for both clothing and food. "Department store and household goods sales also dropped significantly."

The ONS figures showed food stores sales volumes dropped 2.6 percent last month, while non-food stores sales fell by 1.7 percent. However, the wet weather helped online retailers, with 27.4 percent of all retail sales taking place online, the highest proportion since February 2022.

"With the Bank of England's interest rate hikes still feeding through and consumer confidence falling, we remain downbeat on the outlook for overall spending this year," Capital Economics said in its analysis. "Overall, the figures were a bit worse than we had expected. — AFP



SHANGHAI: A child visits the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai. — AFP

Business

KNET launches SoftPOS App to empower digital payment services

App meets needs of small businesses without point-of-sale devices



Esam Al-Kheshnam

KUWAIT: KNET announced on Saturday the launch of the SoftPOS App, targeted toward business owners, and developed to keep pace with technological advancements in the Fintech industry at regional and international levels.

This is in line with KNET's mission to enhance the e-banking experience for customers, which in turn contributes towards building a social culture that keeps pace with the evolution of digital transformation. This will lead to a reduction in the dependency on cash by encouraging the use of various electronic payment channels as an effective and safe alternative.

This app is being introduced in the market as part of KNET's endeavor to expand the infrastructure of payment systems in a

- Encourages innovative digital initiatives and reduces dependency on cash
- Transforms Android mobiles into KNET Point-of-Sale

way that promotes products and services that are secure, efficient, user-friendly and of high quality.

Esam Al-Kheshnam, the Chief Executive Officer at KNET, stated that the SoftPOS application transforms mobile devices running the Android Operating System, and equipped with Near Field Communication (NFC), into a KNET point-of-sale device. KNET has devel-

oped the SoftPOS application to satisfy the requirements and the needs of business owners, specifically commercial segments without point-of-sale devices. As this application serves low-value, high-volume transactions such as barbershops, tailor shops, taxis/transports, delivery services, and other small business owners, it makes it ideal for stationary or mobility use. Merchants can request this service by contacting their bank; the procedures and requirements of each bank may vary.

Al-Kheshnam added, "This step by KNET comes as part of its strategy to provide a comprehensive and effective infrastructure that enhances financial and digital inclusion by encouraging entrepreneurship and emerging projects. In addition, KNET's strategy is aligned with the strategies of Central Bank of

Kuwait, specifically those that focus on encouraging innovative digital initiatives and reducing dependence on cash".

Since digital transformation is a fundamental pillar on which Kuwait's Vision 2035 is based upon, the SoftPOS application contributes to achieving this vision by accelerating innovation and facilitating payments through the latest Fintech. The Shared Electronic Banking Services Company - "KNET" is the leading and distinguished company in the field of electronic payment services in Kuwait. Since its establishment in 1992, KNET has been providing a wide range of innovative payment solutions, both to Commercial and Governmental sectors. KNET is committed to provide the infrastructure and support to meet the demand of a rapidly growing payment industry.

Walmart reports solid quarter

NEW YORK: Walmart raised its full-year forecast as it posted another quarter of solid results, grabbing market share in groceries and other staples against a backdrop of inflationary pressures. The big retailer, which has been seen as well-positioned amid a period of pricing pressure because of its reputation for value, enjoyed another quarter of growing sales at its namesake US stores.

Walmart reported second-quarter profits of \$7.9 billion, up 53 percent from the year-ago period, a time marred by excess inventories due in part to pandemic supply chain issues.



WILMINGTON, United States: A shopper pushes a cart through the parking lot of a Walmart on the morning of Black Friday in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

Revenues rose 5.7 percent to \$161.6 billion. Although inflation has retreated somewhat from its levels a year ago, executives described the US consumer as discriminating, having shifted behaviors compared with pre-pandemic life.

Shoppers are preparing more meals at home, which not only supports demand for groceries, but also lifts sales of kitchen tools such as hand blenders and mixers, executives said.

The chain has also seen an uptick of its Walmart-branded items for household staples such as mustard and potato chips, which have lower sticker prices compared with other brands' offerings.

"Customers are stretching their dollars further

and sticking better value across more categories," said Chief Financial Officer John David Rainey on a conference call with analysts. But Rainey said that customers are still showing a willingness to spend on special occasions.

"Consumers are not compromising on some of the holiday seasons," he said. "Around July 4th and some of the holidays... they're showing a willingness to spend and our team is leaning into that."

Back to school

Walmart's US division — which accounted for more than two-thirds of revenues during the quarter — jumped 6.4 percent in comparable sales, a closely watched industry data point. The business won market share gains in groceries, higher prescription counts and benefited from price hikes on some goods. On the downside, Walmart also cited "softness" in discretionary areas including apparel, home and sporting goods. Higher sales also helped offset the hit from increased spending on employee wages. Chief Executive Doug McMillon described consumers as "resilient," adding that he was encouraged by recent sales trends in the United States in "back to school" promotions, a season that often correlates with other key retail occasions such as Halloween and the winter festive season.

Executives highlighted increased investment in e-commerce and distribution initiatives to make shopping more convenient. McMillon spoke optimistically of artificial intelligence because its potential to help the company personalize customer experience.

"There's a great opportunity for us to be more anticipatory and to be more relevant to them and communicate in a way that shows that we know who they are while protecting privacy," he said.

Walmart lifted full-year projections and now sees full-year earnings of between \$6.36 and \$6.46 a share, up 26 cents from the prior range.

Neil Saunders, analyst at GlobalData Retail, called the results "excellent" given the challenges facing the retail sector. "Inflation and more challenging economic finances made many take a second look at Walmart, but Walmart's ongoing improvements to its range and shopping experience have made them stick around," Saunders said in a note.

Briefing.com described Walmart's outlook as "a bit cautious," but said its report contrasted favorably with smaller big-box rival Target, which is more reliant on discretionary items where demand is weaker. Walmart shares fell 2.2 percent to \$155.69. — AFP



SWISSVALE, US: A US Steel sign is seen outside the Carrie Furnace on January 21, 2020, in Swissvale, Pennsylvania. — AFP

US Steel plays hard to get as suitors line up

NEW YORK: United States Steel has launched a strategic review after receiving several unsolicited offers for a partial or total takeover, and has already rebuffed one "unreasonable" offer. But others potential suitors are pressing ahead. "The board of directors has decided to initiate a formal review process," in order to "evaluate strategic alternatives for the company," US Steel announced in a recent statement.

The reason? The board had received "multiple unsolicited proposals that ranged from the acquisition of certain production assets to consideration for the whole company," chief executive David Burritt said in the statement. One suitor swiftly revealed itself to be US Steel's main competitor, Cleveland-Cliffs.

In a press release, the company said it was seeking a total union to form the only American steelmaker in the world's Top 10 in terms of production volume. Its offer of \$35 per share valued this merger at around \$10 billion, with a cash-and-stock-financed transaction granting a 43 percent premium to US Steel shareholders at August 11 prices. Synergies would amount to around \$500 million. US Steel's board agreed to discuss the matter, but eventually turned the company down, Burritt explained to Cliffs' chief executive Lourenco Goncalves in a letter the company later made public.

White knights

According to Burritt, Cliffs wanted US Steel to agree to its financial terms as a prerequisite to engaging in the due diligence process. "Pushing our board to do so is in essence a demand that it breach its fiduciary duties," Burritt said in his letter, adding he was left with no option but to reject the "unreasonable proposal." The decision was maybe made easier by the fact that other companies have since come forward as white knights — some of them publicly.

The family-owned conglomerate Esmark was one of them. Esmark has offered the same amount per share as Cleveland-Cliffs, with a similar financing combination of cash and securities, it announced in a statement.

Evergrande files for bankruptcy protection

NEW YORK: Embattled Chinese property giant Evergrande Group filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States on Thursday, court documents showed, a measure that protects its US assets while it attempts to restructure. Evergrande, once China's top property developer, was found in 2021 to be struggling with more than \$300 billion in liabilities, as it came under intense pressure after officials tightened scrutiny of the real estate industry. The company's woes have come to symbolize the growing crisis in China's sprawling property sector, which accounts for a huge portion of the world's number two economy, that many fear could spill over globally. Several major developers have been hit in the unfolding drama as they fail to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

The firm said it has 40 years' experience in the steel industry as Esmark Steel Group, and claims to be the fourth-largest steelmaker in the United States.

CFRA Research analyst Matthew Miller told AFP that Esmark already tried its luck in 2016 and 2021, but was rebuffed both times. US Steel has not commented on these advances, which are valid until November 30. ArcelorMittal, the world's second-largest steelmaker, was also reported to be in the running, but declined to comment for the article.

US Steel has said it's open to an offer, but stressed it had "no deadline" to finish its strategic review, and that there was "no assurance" it would accept one. Meanwhile, the steelworkers' union USW has indicated it would prefer the deal put forward by Cleveland-Cliffs.

National security

In a letter shared with Cliffs in early August, USW President Thomas Conway pointed out that the collective agreement in force with US Steel gave him the right to object in the event of a takeover offer for all or part of the company. "USW has a very strong relationship with Cliffs and will not exercise this right," Conway said, asserting that he would not support anyone other than Cliffs. He added that "maintaining American leadership in the steel industry is critical to many vital parts of the US economy." "Given the importance of steel to national security," and USW's effective veto on any other deal, "we expect the deal to achieve regulatory approval," CFRA's Miller said.

He pointed out that US Steel's shareholders would no doubt find the 43 percent premium sufficiently attractive to accept the deal. Cliffs would have a much better chance of obtaining the approval of American regulatory authorities than a foreign group like Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal, he added.

Amid the tussle over the future of US Steel, the ratings agency S&P placed its "BB-" rating under review — at least until a "clear path emerges" in this "highly fluid" situation. US Steel's appeal, according to analysts and industry insiders, stems from the fact it is about to complete a costly investment plan, including the installation of electric arc furnaces instead of coal-fired blast furnaces, to reduce its carbon footprint. And President Joe Biden's major climate plan, in force for just over a year, should eventually lower the cost of American steel, making it highly competitive with European steel, according to an industry source. — AFP

In the latest filings in New York, Tianji Holding and Scenery Journey — of which Evergrande is the ultimate holding company — filed for Chapter 15 protection, which provides mechanisms for dealing with insolvency cases involving more than one country.

Evergrande has worked on an offshore debt restructuring agreement for months and unveiled a proposal earlier this year. The plan offers creditors a choice to swap their debt into new notes issued by the company and equities in two subsidiaries, Evergrande Property Services Group and Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group. Evergrande first defaulted on its bonds in 2021, fanning fears of contagion.

The latest court documents referenced restructuring proceedings in Hong Kong. Yan Yuejin, research director at E-house China R&D Institute, told AFP that Evergrande's latest filing was an "equivalent to seeking a better debt restructuring". "In fact, Evergrande's business is certainly still operational. After all, it has a huge responsibility of ensuring deliveries of presold homes," he told AFP. In July, Evergrande reported a net loss of more than \$113 billion in 2021 and 2022. — AFP

EU gas reserves hit 90% ahead of Nov 1 target

BRUSSELS: Reserves of natural gas in the EU are filled to 90 percent of capacity well ahead of a November 1 target date, making it "well-prepared for winter," its energy commissioner said Friday.

The speedy filling of storage facilities means the bloc is "in a much more stable position than it was this time last year," when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy prices soaring, the commissioner, Kadri Simson, said. The crisis sparked by Russia's war led to the European Union adopting a law requiring the 90-percent gas storage by November 1 each year.

Before Moscow launched its invasion in February 2022, Russia accounted for nearly half of the EU's natural gas imports. Although Russia's gas is not subject to sweeping EU sanctions, its supply to the

EU has dwindled to under ten percent as Moscow has turned off the taps.

That move initially sent energy prices — linked to the price of gas — spiking in mid-2022, but they fell sharply towards the end of the year as Europe benefited from a mild winter and more gas was shipped in from the United States and the Middle East. The European Commission said that, as of Friday, the European Union had filled 90.12 percent of storage capacity, equivalent to 93 billion cubic metres of natural gas. By EU country, the levels varied.

Spain has 99 percent of its capacity filled, while France has 83 percent and Latvia 77 percent.

The commission calculates that, by having 90 percent storage filled, the EU has enough gas to cover a third of its needs over winter. Simson cautioned that gas prices remained "sensitive", with it becoming suddenly more costly early this month because of fall-out from a strike threat at Australian gas facilities and robust Asian demand. The commission would continue to monitor the situation, she said. EU member countries have committed to reducing gas consumption by 15 percent between April this year and the end of March 2024. — AFP



LNG tanker in Lithuania.

Business

Apple megafans celebrate 30 years of tech giant in China

US tech giant looks to ship some production out of China

BEIJING: Apple megafans flocked to Beijing's swish flagship store on Friday as the tech giant kicked off its fourth decade in gadget-mad China — even as it looks to shift some production out of the country. The California-based company held a series of events in Beijing at the first retail store it ever opened in China to mark the milestone of 30 years in the key consumer market.

Enthusiasts gathered at the sleek showroom in the commercial Sanlitun district to soak up the event, which featured an appearance by renowned Chinese record producer Zhang Yadong and several short films shot and edited entirely on Apple products. "I'm an old Apple fan," said 17-year-old high school student Hu Jiarong in front of the Beijing store. "You could say I'm a hardcore fan. I've used iPhones since the 6s all along until the 14 Pro," he added.

"I feel that each new generation is stronger than the last." Since the US-based tech giant first established a presence in China in 1993, Apple has grown into a major provider of smartphones, laptops and consumer electronics in the country. But last year, sales were hit by curtailed production at factories as a result of China's zero-COVID policy.

And US export controls on high-tech components are also threatening the company's supply chain. Despite the developments, the firm still enjoys a strong base of loyal consumers in China. Twenty-two-year-old university student Vicky Zhang told AFP outside the store that she has been using Apple's iPhones since she was in middle school. "It's very comfortable to use, the packaging is very simple, and there aren't any messy and chaotic icons," said Zhang.

Asked if Apple's relocating of production outside of China would impact her future smartphone purchasing decisions, Zhang said: "I don't think so. I think it's just the trend, and not a loss of points from my perspective." In March, Apple CEO Tim Cook visited Beijing, saying his company enjoyed a "symbiotic" relationship with China.

"For 30 years, we've been proud to serve local people," Cook said in an online statement on Friday congratulating the firm on the anniversary. "We'll continue to do our part in enriching the lives of Chinese customers, helping them reach their full potential, and trying our hardest to make the world a better place." — AFP



BEIJING: People attend an event celebrating Apple's 30th anniversary in China at an Apple retail store in Beijing on August 18, 2023. — AFP

US sets up panel in spat with Mexico over GMO corn

WASHINGTON: The United States announced Thursday the establishment of a dispute settlement panel in a row with Mexico over its plans to ban certain genetically engineered agricultural products. The panel, under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, takes aim at earlier plans unveiled by Mexico to gradually substitute the use of genetically engineered corn in products for human consumption and animal feed.

The measure drew criticism from Washington, which said it is challenging measures set out in Mexico's February decree. "Mexico's measures are not based on science and undermine the market access it agreed to provide in the USMCA," said the US Trade Representative's office in a statement on Thursday. This refers to a ban on use of biotech corn in tortillas or dough, and instructions to Mexican government agencies to gradually phase out biotech corn in products for human consumption and for animal feed.

"It is critical that Mexico eliminate its USMCA-inconsistent biotechnology measures," said USTR Katherine Tai. That would allow American farmers to keep accessing the Mexican market and "use innovative tools to respond to climate and food security challenges," she added.

Mexico is a major buyer of yellow corn and imports a significant amount from the United States, where most corn is genetically modified. The Mexican government's decree in February marked a softened stance on banning genetically modified maize, which had fueled tensions with main trading partner the United States. While the decree carved out some exceptions, it held firm on banning GMO corn for human consumption. The latest US move comes after a June request for dispute settlement consultations, but the talks failed to resolve this issue. — AFP

Adyen shares drop 39% on Amsterdam market

THE HAGUE: Global online payments platform Adyen on Thursday lost more than a third of its stock value after announcing net profits below analysts' expectations. At close of trade Thursday on Amsterdam's AEX index, its shares were worth 898.40 euros against 1,472 on opening. The 39-percent drop is the heaviest on the Dutch markets in more than 20 years, according to media reports. It translated to nearly 19 billion dollars in lost market value, said the Dutch news agency ANP.

"Adyen delivered a sizeable revenue miss relative to consensus expectations, reporting its slowest revenue growth rate in its history," said Sanjay Sakhrani of Keefe Bruyette & Woods KBW bank.

"As feared, increased competition in the industry is having an impact on growth, with Adyen noting a discernible slowdown in North America and digital revenues due to increased price competition," he added. Its net revenue was up, posting 739.1 million euros, up 21 percent on the previous year — but again lower than analysts' expectations.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) were down 10 percent on the previous year, at 320 million euros — mainly because of wage rises, said Ayden. "With those kinds of valuations, there was no room for disappointments," Lionel Melka of Swann Capital told AFP.

The company had to be able to present first-class results or risk the kind of market fall it had just suffered, he added. The fall in Adyen's share value dragged Amsterdam's AEX down 2.54 percent.

Based in Amsterdam, Adyen offers online payment services connecting directly to Visa, Mastercard and other payment methods to national and international clients. In 2018, the online payments service nearly doubled its value when it launched on the Amsterdam market at 240 euros. — AFP

US mortgage rate hits highest level in 21 years

WASHINGTON: Mortgage rates in the United States have surged to the highest since 2002, said a home loan finance company Thursday, adding pressure to buyers who are already grappling with high costs and low inventory.

The popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage reached 7.09 percent this week, said Freddie Mac in a statement, adding that it last rose above the seven percent threshold in November 2022. The housing market has been reeling since interest rates rapidly climbed in recent months, a trend that has made home owners reluctant to put their properties up for sale — having previously locked in lower rates on their mortgages.

The current rate will "make it even more difficult for potential homebuyers to afford the new home that they're looking for," said economist Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics. "It's just becoming increasingly unaffordable. Rates are high, there's also signs that the flow of credit is being tightened as well and because of this, there's basically no supply out there," he told AFP.

A year ago, the 30-year rate stood at 5.13 percent while rates hovered below three percent in late 2020. The latest 7.09 percent figure is the highest since April 2002, according to Freddie Mac data.

"The more rates rise, the less likely you are to list



ARLINGTON, US: A house for sale is seen in Arlington, Virginia, July 13, 2023. Mortgage rates in the United States have surged to the highest since 2002, said a home loan finance company on August 17, 2023. — AFP

your house because it just means that you have to move from your sub-four percent mortgage into a new mortgage," Klachkin said.

This could potentially double the cost of home owners' monthly payments, if rates go to eight percent, he added. In June, sales of existing homes fell to the slowest rate since January while

the median sales price hit the second-highest on record, according to National Association of Realtors (NAR) data.

The NAR noted that a third of homes were sold above list price that month. With a lack of existing homes for sale, buyers have been pushed into the market for new properties. — AFP

Why strong US economy is pushing up bond yields

WASHINGTON: Yields on the 10-year US government bond are flirting with a 15-year high this week, amid growing fears that strong growth and low unemployment could keep interest rates higher for longer.

The US Federal Reserve has raised interest rates 11 times since March 2022, and has hinted it may have to do so again in the coming months if inflation remains above its long-term target of two percent. The 10-year US government bond, or Treasury note, is considered to be an especially safe investment, and is closely scrutinized due to its use as a benchmark for pricing everything from home mortgages to commercial loans.

US Treasury note yields are seen as a proxy for interest rates, and often increase when the Federal Reserve raises rates to tackle inflation. Yields have risen sharply since the Fed began an aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes in March last year to tackle a sharp rise in consumer prices.

The impact of these higher yields is already being felt: on Thursday, the interest rate on the popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage in the United States hit its highest level in more than two decades. Against this backdrop, a stronger economy could cause headaches for the Fed, and the financial markets.

Stronger economy

A recent spell of surprisingly positive economic data has diminished fears that the US could enter a recession later this year. Economic growth in the second quarter beat expectations due in large part to

resilient consumer spending, while the unemployment rate has remained close to historic lows.

Although this is good news for millions of Americans, it also raises the likelihood that interest rates will need to remain higher for longer to tackle inflation. "The economy has proven to be quite resilient, and durable," Citigroup Global Chief Economist Nathan Sheets told AFP.

Fed rate hikes

Although inflation has fallen sharply in recent months, it remains stuck above the Fed's long-term target of two percent. The Fed has already raised interest rates 11 times since March, most recently in July, when it lifted its benchmark lending rate by a quarter percentage-point to a range between 5.25-5.5 percent. This decision brought the interest rate to its highest point in more than two decades. On Wednesday, the Fed said "most participants" at its recent rate decision continued to see significant risks that price increases will persist, and that this could require further tightening of monetary policy.

Yields on US government bonds rose following the announcement, as markets digested the likelihood of additional rate hikes. "The bottom line is that the Fed has continued to kind of lean in to rhetoric that says 'look, we'll do what we need to do, and we very well may need to do more in order to achieve our inflation objectives,'" Sheets said. "It doesn't seem like there's any imminent cutting of rates that's anywhere in sight," he added.



While the strong economy and the Fed's interest rate policy have played a significant role in pushing up bond yields, other factors are also at play. Yields on longer-dated bonds have risen sharply since the beginning of August, when the US Treasury Department announced it was increasing its issuance of longer-dated bonds to help pay for increased government spending.

And a day earlier, the ratings agency Fitch surprised the financial markets by downgrading US debt, blaming rising government debt levels and the recent tussle over raising the debt ceiling.

"The repeated debt-limit political standoffs and last-minute resolutions have eroded confidence in fiscal management," Fitch said in a statement. While both factors played a role in pushing up bond yields, their impact is likely to be short-lived. "Issuance can create, you know, short-term headwinds and challenges, but rarely is

a driver over longer term horizons," Sheets from Citi said.

Despite the recent downgrade from Fitch, US Treasuries are still seen as one of the safest places to invest money, due to the US government's long history of paying its debts. In recent months, demand for Treasuries has been boosted by the combination of high interest rates and falling inflation.

This put real, inflation-adjusted interest rates on US bonds firmly in positive territory. "It makes us attractive around the world," Cumberland Advisors' cofounder David Kotok told AFP.

But while bond yields have soared, the US stock markets have stumbled, as the prospect of a higher interest rate environment has come into focus. "I think it's kind of a flashing yellow light, reflecting some uncertainties about where we're headed," Sheets from Citi said. "But it's not a broad kind of pulling back, because it is against the backdrop of a surprisingly resilient US economy," he added. — AFP

Norway central bank marks 12th rate hike

OSLO: Norway's central bank said Thursday it was raising its main interest rate to four percent, its 12th hike in less than two years, and said another

raise was expected in September. "Consumer price inflation has edged down but remains high and markedly above the target," Norges Bank said in a statement.

Like many countries, Norway has been struggling with high inflation since the end of the Covid pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In July, core inflation which excludes energy prices and tax changes — the indicator used by the central bank to guide its monetary policy — was at 6.4 percent year-on-year, well above the

bank's target of around two percent. In September 2021, Norges Bank was one of the first in the Western world to start raising its key rate and it is now at its highest level since the end of 2008.

"If the economy evolves as currently anticipated, the policy rate will be raised further in September," said Ida Wolden Bache, governor of Norges Bank. In June, the bank had signaled that the rate should peak at 4.25 percent this autumn. However, some economists believe it could go higher if inflation persists. — AFP



People attend a Santa Muerte procession in the Queens borough of New York City. — AFP photos



View of the Santa Muerte image placed in an altar before a Santa Muerte religious ceremony in the Queens borough of New York City.

SKELETON SAINT SANTA MUERTE ATTRACTS DEVOTEES AMONG US LATINOS

Standing before an elaborate altar in her living room in New York, Arely Vazquez explains the pledge she made to Santa Muerte — or Saint Death — after surviving pancreas surgery 17 years ago: that she would honor her “little skeleton” by throwing a festival of thanksgiving each year. Vazquez is the main priest, or “madrina,” in the United States of a growing faction of devotees to the skeleton saint revered in Mexico, often alongside traditional Catholic saints.

She calls the movement a “faith, a devotion” that “helps us get out of difficult situations.” For her followers, Santa Muerte — often portrayed carrying a scythe, a globe or a rose — takes on special virtues or powers depending on her clothing and other characteristics.

Faithful from around the country convened before the altar at Vazquez’s annual festival in Queens this month, gathering for prayer, offerings and devotion and sharing stories of the many blessings granted to them by their bony benefactor. Many attendees donned images of Santa Muerte — in large gold pendants, rings and even tattoos.

There are no rules or strict requirements imposed on the followers of what Andrew Chesnut, a professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, calls a “new religious



Arely Vazquez sets up an altar to the image of Santa Muerte after a procession in the Queens borough of New York City.

movement, not a cult or sect,” which first gained popularity in Mexico City in 2001. According to Chesnut, the author of “Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint,” there are about 12 million devotees, mostly in Mexico, but also throughout the United States and Central America. “It’s the fastest growing new religious movement on the planet,” he told AFP via email.

‘Satanic’
Respect for mortality and the afterlife is already entrenched in Mexican culture, rooted in hundreds of years of Catholicism and Indigenous beliefs. Death is seen as an opportunity for new life. For many of her followers, the veneration of Santa Muerte was therefore a natural next step, though their devotions were until recently performed only in private.

And although the Mexican Catholic Church has repeatedly condemned Santa Muerte as “satanic,” “most Mexican devotees still consider themselves Catholic, and approach the Mexican folk saint in very similar ways that they petition the Catholic saints,” Chesnut said. “I believe that something that does good... can’t be anything evil,” said Vazquez, who hopes to open the first chapel in the United States dedicated to Santa Muerte.

For now, the vast majority of Santa Muerte followers have their own skeleton saint figurines displayed in their homes, where they offer gifts such as flowers, alcohol, tobacco and food. But according to expert Cressida Stone, prayer is “vital” in Santa Muerte devotion, “indeed far more so than the size or opulence of your altar.” At the same time, “Santa Muerte can also be vindictive and wrathful to those who do not come through on their promises to her, disrespect her or insult” her, the author of the book “Secrets of Santa Muerte” told AFP.

Direct communion

Without prescribed doctrine to regulate their practice, worshippers commune directly with Santa Muerte, whom they say accepts supplications from all of humanity, regardless of race, nation-

ality, sexual orientation or economic status. In Mexico and El Salvador, the folk saint is venerated by drug traffickers — a so-called narco-saint.

“We come (to the festival) to pray with faith,” said Alejandra Flores, 49, who began following Santa Muerte in 2012, when she finally got a job she had previously been denied because she is transgender, as is Vazquez. “You can be a drug addict, a police officer, trans, whatever,” Flores told AFP, adding that Santa Muerte “welcomes everyone here.”

Mike Rosales, who traveled nearly 200 miles (300 kilometers) from Maryland to participate in the Queens festival, has dedicated a whole room in his house to the skeleton saint, and pauses before the altar every time he goes out or returns home. “I have her for protection, and it feels good,” the 36-year-old Guatemalan said, explaining that he spares no expense for the offerings he gives Santa Muerte. “If she gives to us, why not give to her?” he asked. According to Chesnut, “In Mexico, Central America, and the US, where there are great disparities between rich and poor, Santa Muerte’s leveling scythe is powerfully appealing.” — AFP



View of the Santa Muerte image placed in an altar before a Santa Muerte religious ceremony in the Queens borough of New York City.



People welcome a Santa Muerte image after a procession in the Queens borough of New York City.



A man carries an image of Santa Muerte after a procession in the Queens borough of New York City.

Out of this world deep in the Algerian desert

Deep in the Sahara desert lies the Algerian oasis of Djanet, one of earth’s more stunning locations where visitors may feel they’ve actually been transported to another planet. Parts of the landscape are more Martian or lunar, with only the blue of the sky giving the game away.

Visitors, local and now foreign as well, come to recharge their batteries and explore Djanet, 2,300 kilometers by road (1,430 miles) southeast of Algiers. But there are also flights to the oasis, which is surrounded by sand dunes and sandstone plateaus, site of some of the world’s most impressive prehistoric rock carvings. A mini tourism boom began in eastern Algeria when the authorities started granting visas on arrival in 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic had hit tourism badly worldwide, and Algiers decided to promote the Sahara as a destination by allowing visas to be granted at the airport. Direct flights from Paris to Djanet were key in marketing this strategy. Last year, more than 2,900 foreigners of 35 different nationalities, mostly Westerners, stayed in Djanet, compared with

1,200 in 2021. “Once you come to Djanet, you have to return... I’m here with two friends, and all they want is to come back as soon as possible,” 57-year-old French tourist Karim Benacine told AFP.

Visitors are also attracted by the nearby Tassili n’Ajjer National Park, Africa’s largest, that borders Libya, Niger and Mali. Known for its lunar-like landscape with eroded sandstone orange and black “rock forests”, Tassili has become a photographers’ favorite at sunset.

A vast plateau of 72,000 square kilometers (28,000 square miles), the park also houses what UNESCO calls “one of the most important groupings of prehistoric cave art in the world” with more than 15,000 examples. These “record the climatic changes, the animal migrations and the evolution of human life on the

edge of the Sahara from 6000 BC to the first centuries of the present era”, UNESCO says.

In 1982, Tassili became a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site and a World Natural Heritage Site. Four years later, it was also added to the list of biosphere reserves. It is not just foreigners who are drawn to the area: Algerians also find solace in their own national treasure, with 17,000 local visitors recorded last year.

‘Disconnecting, rejuvenating’

For 41-year-old Samira Ramouni, a psychologist from Algiers, staying at the oasis means many things. “Finding inner peace, experiencing complete relaxation, disconnecting, seeking calm, learning new things, rejuvenating...” Ramouni said she came to Djanet to rest and relax

“to be able to start the struggle anew”. Abdelkader Regagda runs a travel agency in Tamanrasset in southern Algeria, around 700 kilometers west of Djanet. He now organizes excursions in the Djanet area, and told AFP the authorities had opened “a great tourism route from Europe to the south” of Algeria.

Djanet is the scene at the end of July of the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of the local Tuareg culture. The area has certainly struck a chord with tourists from Europe. Another visitor from Paris, Antonine De Saint Pierre, 49, said her trip deep into the Algerian desert was exactly what she needed. “Now I know that, I think I’m going to do this regularly,” she added. — AFP



Men and women perform a traditional dance during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria.



Visitors are seen during the Sebeiba Festival, a yearly celebration of Tuareg culture, in the oasis town of Djanet in southeastern Algeria. — AFP photos

Lifestyle

Belgian university enters new era with Taylor Swift course

From "Alice in Wonderland" to "The Great Gatsby", "Rebecca" to "Jane Eyre", the songs of singer-songwriter Taylor Swift are filled with clear and subtle literary references. Now, a literature professor in Belgium has seized on the bookish qualities of Swift's lyrics to launch a course using the US superstar's songs to delve into the greats of English writing and the themes of their work.

For Elly McCausland, an assistant professor at Ghent University, Swift's songs offer an opportunity to explore feminism, for example through "The Man", and the anti-hero trope through the aptly named song "Anti-Hero" from her 2022 album, "Midnights". McCausland decided earlier this year to mastermind a course to start in September inspired by Swift's work after listening to "The Great War", also from "Midnights".

"The way she uses the war, like a metaphor for a relationship, made me a bit uncomfortable and it got me think-



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift performs during her Eras Tour at Sofi stadium in Inglewood, California. - AFP

ing about Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy', which does a similar thing and also it's very uncomfortable reading," the academic told AFP. McCausland knew all too well the power of the singer's work as a "real Swiftie" herself and insists that the course, "Literature (Taylor's Ver-

sion)", is a way to make literature "more accessible" and "not to create a Swift fan club".

"The whole point is to get people to think that English literature is not a load of old books from a long time ago festering in a library. But it's a living, breathing thing and it's continually evolving and changing," she said. The academic stressed other artists and media could be used for the same goal, for example, Beyonce or even the video-sharing platform TikTok.

McCausland's course uses Swift's lyrics as a gateway into reading some of the greats of the literary canon such as William Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte, Geoffrey Chaucer and William Thackeray. Swift refers to the works of several more writers, including Charles Dickens and Emily Dickinson, and McCausland noted parallels also with the style of other writers including British Romantic poets of the early 19th century.

In the songs "Wonderland" and "long

story short", Swift mentions going down a "rabbit hole", a reference to Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". In a 2020 conversation with Paul McCartney published by Rolling Stone during the Covid-19 pandemic, the songwriter described her love of words and how she was "reading so much more than I ever did" including Daphne du Maurier's "Rebecca".

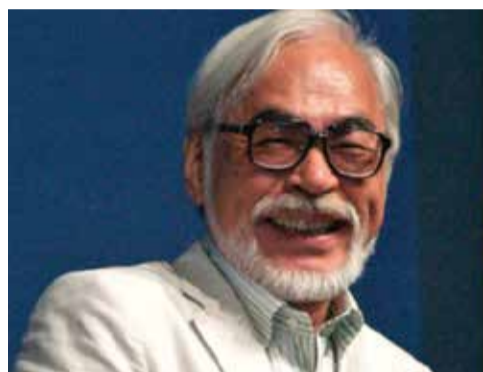
The course is very popular and McCausland has received requests to join from outside the university, even via private messages on Instagram. There has been snobbery and criticism online, questioning the merit of using Swift's work in higher education. McCausland made parallels with the skepticism singer-songwriter Bob Dylan faced after winning the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature.

Swift's career peak

Swift has gone from strength to strength since her debut album in 2006, reaching the pinnacle of her career this

year with the Eras Tour, currently competing with Beyonce's Renaissance to become the first billion-dollar tour. The 33-year-old also this year became the first woman to have four albums in the top 10 of the US charts at the same time.

Swift shows no inclination to slow down as she prepares for the Latin American leg of her tour starting next week before Asia, Australia, Europe and North America in 2024, all while preparing to release a re-recording of her 2014 album "1989" this October. While McCausland's course is perhaps the first of its kind in Europe, across the Atlantic, New York University's Clive Davis Institute is believed to have launched the first course focused on the songwriter last year. And in London, there was a summer school at Queen Mary University in July, titled "Taylor Swift and Literature", looking at her work through a similarly literary lens. — AFP



Miyazaki's final film to open San Sebastian festival

Oscar-winning Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki's final film, "The Boy and the Heron", will open Spain's San Sebastian film festival next month, organizers said Thursday. The animated fantasy epic, which Miyazaki has said will be his last, will screen on September 22 in what will be the film's European premiere. The screening will come just two weeks after the film opens the Toronto film festival on September 7, a rare double opening for two film festivals.



The film tells the story of a grieving boy who discovers an abandoned tower in his new town and enters a fantastical world with a talking grey heron. Known for vivid colors and loving depictions of landscapes, the 82-year-old's films still rely primarily on hand-drawing each frame.

His "Spirited Away" won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature of 2002 and was a huge hit internationally. Miyazaki received an honorary Oscar for his lifetime achievements in film in 2014. Spanish movie star Javier Bardem will receive a lifetime achievement award at the opening gala of the festival, which runs until September 30. Originally intended to honor Spanish language films, San Sebastian has established itself as one of the world's top movie festivals. — AFP

Scorsese backs petition against Iran director's jailing

Martin Scorsese has backed a petition against the jailing of prominent Iranian movie director Saeed Roustaei for screening a film at the Cannes Film Festival. Scorsese, the Oscar-winning director of "Taxi Driver" and "Goodfellas," reposted a campaign launched by his daughter Francesca this week after news of Roustaei's prison sentence emerged.

"Please sign this petition to bring justice to Saeed," Scorsese wrote on Instagram. Roustaei, 34, was sentenced to six months' prison for the screening of his film "Leila's Brothers" at the Cannes festival last year, Iranian media reported Tuesday.

The film, which recounts the economic struggles of a family in Tehran, is banned in Iran. Roustaei and the movie's producer, Javad Noruzbegi, were found guilty of "contributing to propaganda of the opposition against the Islamic system," Iranian reformist daily Etamad said. The sentence includes a ban on working for five years.

The filmmakers will only serve about



US director Martin Scorsese waves during a photocall for the film "Killers of the Flower Moon" at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

nine days in prison, while the remainder "will be suspended over five years," according to Etamad, which added the verdict can be appealed. In her petition Francesca Scorsese, an actor and director, wrote: "We now have less than 20 DAYS to help garner enough attention to appeal his sentence." She urged supporters to sign so that Roustaei "can continue to be a force of good in

the world."

The petition was two-thirds of the way to reaching its 15,000-signature target Thursday. "Leila's Brothers" movie won the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) award at Cannes last year.

Official Iranian media has said the film "broke the rules by being entered at international film festivals without authorization," and the director refused to "correct" it as requested by the culture ministry. Cannes festival organizers this week denounced "a serious violation of free speech for Iranian artists, filmmakers, producers and technicians."

Iran has long had a thriving cinema scene, with figures like Jafar Panahi and Asghar Farhadi scooping awards around the world. Roustaei has gained international renown since the 2019 release of his film "Just 6.5," an uncompromising look at Iran's drug problem and the brutal, and fruitless, police response. — AFP



US singer Dolly Parton attends the Academy of Country Music (ACM) Awards at Ford Center at the Star in Frisco, Texas. - AFP

Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr join Dolly Parton on 'Let It Be'

Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr have joined Dolly Parton in recording a version of the Beatles classic "Let It Be" on the country legend's upcoming album. The track was released on Friday and will feature on the 77-year-old Parton's upcoming album "Rockstar." "Well, does it get any better than singing 'Let It Be' with Paul McCartney who wrote the song?" Parton said on her website. "Not only that, he played piano!

"Well, it did get even better when Ringo Starr joined in on drums, Peter Frampton on guitar and Mick Fleetwood playing percussion," she said. "I mean, seriously, how much better does it get? Thanks guys!" "Rockstar," Parton's 49th album, will be released on November 17. It features her renditions of 21 pop and rock classics along with nine original songs.

According to Billboard, other rockers joining Parton on the album include Elton John, Sting, Lizzo, Pink, Debbie Harry, Steve Perry, Steven Tyler, Stevie Nicks, Pat Benatar, Joan Jett, John Fogerty, Miley Cyrus and Ann and Nancy Wilson. The "Let It Be" rendition is a rare collaboration between the two surviving Beatles, Billboard said. McCartney, 81, joined Starr, 83, in 2020 for a song on the drummer's album "Zoom In," it said, and Starr made a surprise appearance in 2019 at one of McCartney's concert tour stops. — AFP

Michael Jackson's sexual abuse lawsuits revived by appeals court

California appeals court on Friday revived lawsuits from two men who allege Michael Jackson sexually abused them for years when they were boys. A three-judge panel from California's 2nd District Court of Appeal found that the lawsuits of Wade Robson and James Safechuck should not have been dismissed by a lower court, and that the men can validly claim that the two Jackson-owned corporations that were named as defendants in the cases had a responsibility to protect them. A new California law that temporarily broadened the scope of sexual abuse cases enabled the appeals court to restore them. It's the second time the lawsuits — brought by Robson in 2013 and Safechuck the following year — have been brought back



Michael Jackson after dismissal.

The two men became more widely known for telling their stories in the 2019 HBO documentary "Leaving Neverland." A judge who dismissed the suits in 2021 found that the corporations, MJJ Productions Inc. and MJJ Ventures Inc., could not be expected to function like the Boy Scouts or a church where a child in their care could expect their protection. Jackson, who died in 2009, was the sole owner and only shareholder in the companies.

The higher court judges disagreed, writing that "a corporation that facilitates the sexual abuse of children by one of its employees is not excused from an affirmative duty to protect those children merely because it is solely owned by the perpetrator of the abuse." They added that "it would be perverse to find no duty based on the corporate defendant having only one shareholder. And so we reverse the judgments entered for the corporations." Jonathan Steinsapir, attorney for the Jackson estate, said they were "disappointed."

"Two distinguished trial judges repeatedly dismissed these cases on numerous occasions over the last decade

because the law required it," Steinsapir said in an email to The Associated Press. "We remain fully confident that Michael is innocent of these allegations, which are contrary to all credible evidence and independent corroboration, and which were only first made years after Michael's death by men motivated solely by money."

Vince Finaldi, an attorney for Robson and Safechuck, said in an email that they were "pleased but not surprised" that the court overturned the previous judge's "incorrect rulings in these cases, which were against California law and would have set a dangerous precedent that endangered children throughout state and country. We eagerly look forward to a trial on the merits."

Steinsapir had argued for the defense in July that it does not make sense that employees would be legally required to stop the behavior of their boss. "It would require low-level employees to confront their supervisor and call them pedophiles," Steinsapir said. Holly Boyer, another attorney for Robson and Safechuck, countered that the boys "were left alone in this lion's den by the defendant's employees. An affirmative duty to protect and to warn is correct."

Steinsapir said evidence that has been gathered in the cases, which have not reached trial, showed that the parents had no expectation of Jackson's employees to act as monitors. "They were not looking to Michael Jackson's companies for protection from Michael Jackson," the lawyer argued said.

But in a concurring opinion issued with Friday's decision, one of the panelists, Associate Justice John Shepard Wiley Jr., wrote that "to treat Jackson's wholly-owned instruments as different from Jackson himself is to be mesmerized by abstractions. This is not an alter ego case. This is a same ego case." The judges did not rule on the truth of the allegations themselves. That will be the subject of a forthcoming jury trial in Los Angeles. "We trust that the truth will ultimately prevail with Michael's vindication yet again," Steinsapir said Friday. Robson, now a 40-year-old choreographer, met Jackson when he was 5 years old. He went on to appear in three Jackson music videos. His lawsuit alleged that Jackson molested him over a seven-year period.



Russian opera soprano singer Anna Netrebko performs during the 27th annual Victoires de la musique classique (Classical music award) ceremony at the l'Arsenal de Metz, in Metz, northeastern France. - AFP photos

Prague cancels concert by Russian soprano Netrebko over Ukraine

Prague has cancelled an October concert by Russian soprano Anna Netrebko over her country's invasion of Ukraine, organizers said Thursday. Netrebko, whose past support for Russian President Vladimir Putin has led to cancellations of several concerts worldwide, was due to perform at Prague's Municipal House on October 16. The Czech Republic, an EU and NATO member, has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine since Russia's invasion last year and has provided Kyiv with substantial military and humanitarian aid.

The Nachtigall Artists Management agency said on Facebook it had agreed with the venue to cancel the sold-out concert following opposition from Prague's centre-right council. The agency cited "circumstances which have gradually converted a purely artistic project into... a political and social polemic."

The Czech news agency CTK quoted Prague councilor Jiri Pospisil as hailing "the correct decision in relation to our key partner fighting for its independence." Netrebko withdrew from the Metropolitan Opera in New York in March 2022 after refusing to repudiate her support of Putin following the Ukraine invasion.

The 51-year-old opera superstar later condemned the war and announced a return to European stages, but has never publicly criticized Putin directly. Netrebko's website lists dozens of performances for the rest of the year, including in Berlin, Guangzhou, Paris, Vienna and Milan. — AFP



Russian opera soprano singer Anna Netrebko looks on as she speaks to the media before a rehearsal at the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens.



People visit the recently opened Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



Boys hold felines at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



A boy holds a feline at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



A girl holds a feline at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City. - AFP photos



Cat cafe brings pawsitivity to war-scarred Gaza

A cat cafe in the Gaza Strip aims to “cheer up” Palestinian residents and offer them a respite from the trials of daily life in the blockaded territory, its owner said. At the Meow Cat Cafe which opened this week in Gaza City, owner Nehma Maabad set out food for a clowder of kittens. “Cats, for me, are a refuge that relieves me of psychological stress. So I thought of creating a project that combines serving people with something to cheer them up,” said the 50-year-old.

Part of the space is kitted out with wooden platforms covered in astroturf for the cats to clamber onto, while feline murals and portraits adorn the walls. Meow is part of a growing global

trend of cat cafes, but the circumstances in Gaza are unique.

The territory has been under a crippling Zionist entity blockade since 2007 and scars of repeated wars fought between Palestinian militants and the Zionist entity are visible across the city. Customers pay nearly 10 shekels (\$2.65) per hour to play with the cats, which Maabad said covers their food as well as costly vet bills.

Visiting the cafe, Manar Abu Samra said it was reasonably priced and she had told her friends and sisters about the new venture. “The quality of cats here is beautiful and sweet, so it’s a wonderful idea — despite its strangeness to society — and when I heard

about it I felt happy,” she said. Pets are rare in Gaza although cats are ever-present, particularly around the port or fishmongers as they try to paw away some scraps.

Maabad said she had cats at home to bring to Meow, while others came from friends. “The idea of the cafe was to have something nice with a cup of coffee,” she said. “A cat that you play with and it makes you smile and forget the pressures of life.” — AFP



A woman holds a feline at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



People visit the recently opened Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



Owner Nehma Maabad holds a feline at her newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



A woman holds a feline at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



A feline plays at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



Children hold felines at the newly inaugurated Cat Cafe in Gaza City.



Italy settles bill for runaway tourists in Albania

Italy’s embassy in Albania settled a restaurant bill left unpaid by holidaying Italians after Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni demanded diplomats address it as a matter of national pride. News of the tourists’ decision to run off after dinner in the picturesque central city of Berat made headlines in Albania’s media, and lit up social networks.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama revealed he had raised the incident with Meloni when they met this week while she herself was holidaying in his country - and she immediately stepped in. “She made a face and ordered the ambassador to ‘go and pay the bill for these idiots, please, and put out a statement! Italy cannot lose respect like this!’” Rama told La

Stampa, an Italian daily. The Italian embassy in Albania confirmed Friday it had acted on her orders and paid what Italian media said had been an 80 euro (\$87) tab for four people. “On the recommendation of the prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, we settled the bill left unpaid by a group of Italian tourists at a restaurant in the city of Berat,” it said

in a statement. “Italians respect the rules and pay their debts, and we hope that this kind of episode will not be repeated.” Several Italian news outlets have reported a surge in Italian tourists heading across the Adriatic Sea for their holidays this year, in search of cheaper deals and quieter beaches. — AFP

Sports

Zain fantasy football kicks off with KD 10,000 prize pool

Company invites fans to sign up before league starts on 24 August

News in Brief

MLB, MLS games shuffled

LOS ANGELES: Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer on Friday rescheduled games planned for Sunday in Southern California as the region braces for the arrival of Hurricane Hilary. Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers, Los Angeles Angels and San Diego Padres will all play doubleheaders on Saturday, bringing forward the games that were due to be played on Sunday. The Dodgers are now set to play two games against the Miami Marlins on Saturday while the Angels play two against the Tampa Bay Rays and the Padres play two against the Arizona Diamondbacks. The Pacific hurricane has triggered a warning of "potentially catastrophic" flooding on Mexico's Baja California peninsula and further north in the US state of California. — AFP

Bagnaia on pole in Austria

SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD: World champion Francesco Bagnaia will start on pole for the Austrian MotoGP after Ducati's series leader topped qualifying at the Red Bull Ring circuit on Saturday. Joining the Italian, who leads the championship by 41 points, on the front row for Saturday's sprint and Sunday's main event are Maverick Vinales (Aprilia) and Brad Binder (KTM). This was Bagnaia's fifth pole out of 10 this season and the 16th of his career. Binder's Australian KTM teammate Jack Miller, Alex Marquez (Ducati-Gresini) and Luca Marini (Ducati-VR46), fill the second row. South African Binder made the front row hours after signing a new contract with Austrian factory team KTM at their home track until 2026. — AFP

US GM Markgraf resigns

CHICAGO: United States women's national team general manager (GM) Kate Markgraf has resigned, US Soccer said Saturday, following head coach Vlatko Andonovski to the exit after a disappointing Women's World Cup campaign. Markgraf, who had been in the role for the past four years, departs after the Americans, who had hoped for a third consecutive crown, were eliminated in the last 16 by Sweden after a penalty shootout, the earliest the team has ever departed from a World Cup. Andonovski's resignation came Thursday, with Twila Kilgore, an assistant coach for the past 18 months, named interim head coach while the search for a replacement takes place. Markgraf will stay on until the end of August to assist in the leadership transition. — AFP

Leeds remain winless

LONDON: Leeds remain without a league victory since April after snatching a 1-1 draw against West Bromwich Albion in Friday's Championship clash at Elland Road. Aiming for an immediate return to the Premier League after last season's relegation, Leeds are off to a slow start in the second tier. Daniel Farke's side trailed to Brandon Thomas-Asante's controversial opener, which came off his arm, early in the second half. Luke Ayling rescued Leeds with his bullet header in the closing stages, but the Yorkshire club are without a win in three league games this season. Leeds had started brightly and Daniel James forced Alex Palmer into a good low save after a deflection. The hosts threatened again when Jamie Shackleton's speculative effort took a wicked deflection off Cedric Kipre as it hit the base of the post. — AFP

Kerley dismisses threat

BUDAPEST: Fred Kerley will bid to retain his world 100m crown in Budapest on Sunday, but the blue riband event of track and field is arguably as open as it has been in 20 years. For once, there is no clear favorite for the shortest speed event although Kerley and US teammate Noah Lyles were quick Friday to dismiss any fears of the threat posed by Olympic champion Marcell Jacobs. Jacobs has only raced outdoors once this season, finishing seventh in 10.21 seconds at the Paris Diamond League race won by Lyles last month. "I know what form he's in, we all saw it," Lyles said with a grin when asked what Jacobs might bring to the track. Another question on the Italian sprinter saw Lyles retort to Kerley: "Damn, Fred, this man is popular, how did this man get so popular?" Kerley replied. — AFP

Etoile Sahel win in Algeria

JOHANNESBURG: A superb solo goal from Soumaila Sidibe set up Etoile Sahel of Tunisia for a 2-0 victory at CS Constantine of Algeria on Friday as 2023-2024 CAF Champions League qualifying kicked off. The Guinean received possession halfway inside the Constantine half and dribbled past several Algerians before beating goalkeeper Kheirredine Boussouf from close range. Hamza Jelassi sealed success for the visitors by converting a penalty eight minutes into added time in northeast Algeria. Etoile are seeking a second Champions League title after a stunning 3-1 away triumph over Al-Ahly of Egypt in the second leg of the 2007 final. — AFP

KUWAIT: Zain has announced the kick-off of this season's Dawri Zain Fantasy League: the first-ever local fantasy football game exclusively dedicated to the Kuwaiti Premier League. The winners of the top three places will share a prize pool of KD 10,000 in cash at the end of the season. Last season's edition of the game was wildly successful, having attracted thousands of local football enthusiasts and Dawri Zain fans. Holders of the top three places in the leaderboards were crowned on-stage during Zain's prestigious Excellence Awards ceremony, held to recognize last season's top performing athletes.

With this launch, Zain brings the thrills of Kuwaiti football to the digital space. Fantasy Football is one of the most popular online games in European and international sports leagues, and the company has brought this thrilling and highly competitive experience to local fans with a platform that is exclusively dedicated to the Kuwaiti Premier League.

Zain invites fans to sign up and create their fantasy teams before the league kicks-off on 24 August for the chance to collect the highest possible number of points. The game is available on the web at dawrizain.com, and on smartphones via the Dawri Zain app for iOS on the

App Store and for Android on the Play Store. The game offers a thrilling experience for users to pick their own lineup, compete with other players, and collect the most points to achieve the fantasy league title. Users must buy 15 players from the available KD 100m budget to form their team, and all prices and points scored reflect the actual performance in the Kuwaiti Premier League.

The game is highly competitive and relies on each player's intuition and how much they know about the league. To encourage fans to play, compete, and passionately follow their teams, Zain offers cash prizes of KD 10,000 to the winners of the Dawri Zain Fantasy Football League. The prizes will be given to the holders of the first three places in the leaderboards at the end of the season as follows: KD 5,000 for the first-place winner, KD 3,500 for the second-place winner, and KD 1,500 for the third-place winner.

The announcement comes under the umbrella of Zain's strategic partnership with the Kuwait Football Association for the 2022-2026 seasons, which includes the Kuwait Premier League (Dawri Zain) and First Division League. Zain also extends its support to HH the Amir's Cup, HH the Crown Prince's Cup, and the KFA Cup (Zain Cup).



Kuwait SC Judo Squad



Saleh Fadhel Hussein wins silver medal

Kuwait grabs 34 medals at Judo Championships

CAIRO: Kuwait's tally of medals topped 34 on Friday at the end of the Arab Judo Championships, hosted in the New Alamein city, northwest Egypt, over the past three days. The championship gathered athletes from 61 sporting clubs from 18 Arab countries, including Kuwait, Qadsia, Khaitan and Sulaibikhat from Kuwait.

Kuwait SC snatched 18 medals, Qadsia 13, and Khaitan three. Kuwait SC ranked second in the general rating of the junior teams and third in the minor team rating, said the club's judo coach Motalq Fahad Al-Mershad told KUNA. He noted that the club's 14-strong judo squad, juniors and minors, had held a training camp in Cairo for 10 days on August 2-11 in the run-up to the championship which help the team make this outstanding achievement.

Meanwhile, Qadsia judo coach Adham Jamal said his team ranked top after winning the gold medal of the teams' event and came third in the in-



dividuals' event. Khaitan's minors won three medals, gold, silver and bronze, the club's coach said in similar statements to KUNA. The championship

was organized by the Egyptian Judo Federation in collaboration with the Arab Judo Federation on August 15-18. — KUNA

French League's kick-off put back over heatwave

PARIS: The kick-off for the Ligue 1 match between Monaco and Strasbourg on Sunday has been put back almost two hours "due to the heatwave", the French League (LFP) announced on Friday. The game was scheduled for 17.05 local time (1505 GMT) but temperatures in the Principality are forecast to hit 33 degrees Celsius (91 Fahrenheit) that afternoon. "In anticipation of high temperatures at the Stade Louis-II in the afternoon, the kick-off of the Monaco-Strasbourg match... has been shifted to 7:00 pm on the same day," the LFP said in a statement.

It is the second fixture switch for the second round of games. The LFP announced on Thursday that the Lyon-Montpellier match on Saturday had been pushed back two hours to 19.00 local time. Temperatures of 36 Celsius are forecast for Lyon that afternoon. "I congratulate and thank the League for this change of schedule," Monaco coach Adi Hutter told a press conference.

"The heat is very intense at the moment. We saw it at Clermont last Sunday, where a lot of people cramped up." Monaco won their opener 4-2 away to Clermont last Sunday afternoon as temperatures touched 30 degrees. On Friday, 19 of France's departments were placed on heatwave alert by the country's meteorological office with temperatures likely to exceed 40 degrees Celsius in parts of the country.

Three days after going out of the Champions League, Marseille struggled to a 2-2 draw at Metz in French Ligue 1 on Friday, despite playing with an



LONGEVILLE-LES-METZ: Metz's French midfielder #10 Youssef Maziz (right) fights for the ball with Marseille's Senegalese forward #23 Ismael Sarr during the French L1 football match between FC Metz and Olympique Marseille (OM) on August 18, 2023. — AFP

extra man for more than 30 minutes. Marseille took a 14th-minute with 18-year-old Emran Soglo's first goal for the club, a low shot at the near post. The visitors appeared to be heading for victory when Metz centre-back Ababacar Lo was sent off for planting his studs on Iliman Ndiaye's ankle in the 59th minute.

Yet Metz, newly promoted to Ligue 1, scored twice in the next 12 minutes. Cheikh Sabaly levelled with a 65th-minute shot that deflected off Marseille midfielder Valentin Rongier (65th) and past goalkeeper Pau Lopez. Georges Mikautadze volleyed Metz ahead after a 71st-minute corner. Marseille dominated and levelled when Vitinha, on as a substitute in the 75th minute, found space in the area and fired home a low, diagonal shot in the 82nd minute. — AFP

United States thump Greece in basketball World Cup warm up

ABU DHABI: The United States beat Greece in Abu Dhabi on Friday in a basketball World Cup warm-up game but head coach Steve Kerr said his side is still adapting to international rules. The Americans claimed a confidence-boosting 108-86 victory in the exhibition game, just 10 days before the two teams face off again in Group C action at the upcoming FIBA World Cup in Manila. The United States exploded off the blocks, opening up a 13-point gap on the Greeks six minutes into the first quarter.

Despite questionable turnovers during patches of the game, the USA were a class apart as they extended their perfect record in World Cup tune-ups to 4-0 in games played in Las Vegas, Malaga in Spain and now in the United Arab Emirates. Kerr said officiating has varied over the games and that players will have to learn to adjust. "We'll definitely make some improvement in that area. Officiating was a little different in Spain than it was here and we have to adapt," Kerr said after the win. "The FIBA officials are coming from all over the world so sometimes they have different interpretations of things," Kerr said.

"So we have to adapt and be ready for whatever is called and however the game is being called. And there are different rules, different nuances that we're trying to teach in practice every day." In a packed Etihad Arena, USA started with Mikal Bridges, Brandon Ingram, Jaren Jackson Jr., Anthony Edwards and Jalen Brunson, but that line-up quickly evolved as the entire roster got minutes against Greece. Minnesota Timberwolves guard Edwards top-scored for the United States with 21 points and four rebounds. Cameron Johnson of the Brooklyn Nets sunk 13 points, including a trio of threes. — AFP

Sports

Man City would be 'killed' for Chelsea's spending: Guardiola

Chelsea splash out nearly £1 billion

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola has claimed Manchester City would be "killed" if they spent as much money on new signings as Chelsea have over the last 12 months. City's spending since Sheikh Mansour's takeover in 2008 has repeatedly come under scrutiny, with the club facing 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of financial regulations. But Guardiola is adamant their approach had always been prudent, in contrast to the wild spending by Todd Boehly's ownership group at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea have splashed out nearly £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) since the start of last summer. City have signed Josko Gvardiol and Mateo Kovacic in this window for a combined £100 million, yet Guardiola was quick to show irritation over the astronomical sums paid by Chelsea. "I couldn't sit here if we spent what Chelsea spent in the last two transfer windows - you would kill me," Guardiola told reporters on Friday.

"You will kill me. That is for sure. We'd be under scrutiny like you couldn't imagine. When people say just Manchester City and Pep Guardiola buy players, I didn't know I had a lot of money in my pocket to buy all the players I have. "We have to see what happens in the market and if we can do it and to pay what we believe is fair. "We wanted (Harry) Maguire and didn't

buy him because we didn't want to pay. We wanted (Marc) Cucurella and didn't pay. We wanted Alexis Sanchez and didn't pay. "In the end, we will pay what is fair to do it. Otherwise, we have the academy."

Guardiola tried to insist he was not criticizing Chelsea, but the Catalan clearly feels a sense of double standards. "They can do what they want," he added. "I don't criticize Chelsea for one second. I'm saying, if we do it, we are dead, all around the world. They can do whatever they want. "If they want to spend, I don't know, £900 million since (Boehly) arrived, 900 more, 900 more. They have it. The business is the business. They sell a lot this season so they can do it. "Everybody wins. Tell me the truth: are you enjoying a lot the transfer window? This player, the other one, every few minutes on Sky TV, a new player here, new player there. It's so funny."

Despite bemoaning Chelsea's spending, Guardiola said he was speaking to director of football Txiki Begiristain about their options in the window after star midfielder Kevin De Bruyne was ruled out for several months with a hamstring injury. "We maybe need to add someone else," Guardiola said. "My opinion is I like a small squad. But the blow from Kevin changes the perspective. He is a very important player and it

is not one or two weeks. "We are not the only ones spending a lot of money in the last few years."

Chelsea's big-money

Meanwhile, Mauricio Pochettino refused to guarantee first team places to Chelsea's big money signings after the club's spending. Southampton midfielder Romeo Lavia completed his £53 million switch to Stamford Bridge on Friday as the club's shopping spree showed no signs of abating. The Chelsea have made eight signings since the Argentine took charge in the close-season even though Pochettino has expressed a desire to trim the club's already bloated squad.

Moises Caicedo was signed from Brighton for a British record £115 million on Monday to bolster Chelsea's midfield options. With the highly-rated Lavia on board as well, Pochettino knows he will be expected to unleash a new-look side when Chelsea travel to London rivals West Ham on Sunday.

But, despite the club's financial outlay, Pochettino wants his new recruits to prove they are worth a place in his plans. "The players have a clear idea that they need to compete for their place and then it's the coach that is going to decide who are the best for every single game," Pochettino told reporters on Friday. "It's

not that if we sign a player and we spend big money, that they are sure to play. I don't tell Moises or Lavia 'you are going to play, whether you are good or bad'. It's not like this, football.

"Talented players, players that the club spends money on, they need to show every day that they deserve to play. "My job is to be fair with everyone in the squad. You sign a player on an eight-year contract and after that he doesn't run, is not involved, no commitment - is he going play? That is our job. It's our judgment. "I have the support of the owner, I have the support of the sporting director, so far. They need to trust in our judgment. It's not the people of social media, it's our judgment."

Chelsea have pursued a policy of awarding unusually long contracts under the ownership of Todd Boehly's Clearlake Capital consortium, with deals of between six and eight years commonplace at the club. Pochettino was asked how easy it would be to get rid of players on lengthy deals who are unwilling to work for their place in the side. "If you have an eight-year contract, you need to be responsible," he said. "Players need to show respect, need to show commitment, need to show the performance that we expect from them. If not, they're not going to play. — AFP

Neymar greeted with much fanfare in Saudi

RIYADH: Neymar was greeted with much fanfare Friday as he arrived in Saudi Arabia where he joins a growing list of big names lured to the oil-rich kingdom. The 31-year-old Brazil forward who will be unveiled as an Al-Hilal player on Saturday after six seasons with French champions Paris Saint-Germain landed in a Riyadh airport equipped with extra security for the occasion. Neymar was received in an airport lounge packed with club officials and press, a large diamond-studded cross hanging around his neck as he posed for pictures.

A rock star welcome will await him at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh where he will be unveiled before thousands of fans. "We will hold a big party worthy of the samba dancer," said an Al-Hilal official who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the press. Neymar's two-year contract with Al-Hilal will see him earn a salary of around 100 million euros per season, according to sources close to the deal.

He follows Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Sadio Mane in swapping Europe for the Saudi Pro League, which has a hit-list of high-profile targets. Neymar scored 118 goals in 173 matches for PSG, winning five Ligue 1 titles and three French Cups, but his time at PSG was blighted by a catalogue of injuries. Although he helped the club to the 2020 Champions League final, which they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich, he was sidelined for key games.

He underwent surgery on his right ankle in early March, only returning to join PSG on their pre-season tour of Asia. With billions of dollars in oil wealth, Saudi Arabia has been on a buying spree of sports assets as part of plans to diversify its economy and attract tourism and investment. The conservative monarchy, often criticized for its human rights record, bought English club Newcastle United in 2021, the same year it hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix. — AFP



RIYADH: Brazilian forward Neymar arrives to Riyadh after signing for Al-Hilal on a two-year contract. — AFP



GOSFORD: Players from England participate in a training session at Central Coast Stadium in Gosford on August 19, 2023, on the eve of the Women's World Cup football final match between Spain and England. — AFP

Women World Cup showcases progress but also challenges

SYDNEY: Sunday's World Cup final between England and Spain is the final act of a month of drama which highlighted how far women's football has come — and the challenges that lie ahead. There had been fears that the biggest-ever Women's World Cup - 32 teams, up from 24 four years ago — would dilute the spectacle in Australia and New Zealand. Lopsided scorelines were a feature of the previous eight World Cups and critics said debutants such as Haiti, the Philippines and Morocco would be on a hiding to nothing.

But the opposite proved to be true and the tournament will be best remembered for the large number of shocks and the end of the United States' long reign as world champions. Among the surprises, Germany were beaten 2-1 by Colombia on the way to a group-stage exit. Italy, Brazil and Olympic champions Canada also went out at the first hurdle. The Philippines, New Zealand, Zambia, Portugal, Jamaica, South Africa and Morocco all won a World Cup game for the first time.

The United States were chasing an unprecedented third title in a row but it very quickly became apparent that they were not the force of old and that the rest had caught up. Their exit in the last 16 on penalties to Sweden was their worst World Cup ever and coach Vlatko Andonovski quit this week. There was no

fairytale ending for Megan Rapinoe, who retires from football at the end of the season.

"It has been an amazing World Cup with 32 teams and lots of teams who have improved," Sweden coach Peter Gerhardsson said following his team's 2-1 defeat to Spain in the semi-finals. "Everywhere around the world there will be a lot more interest in women's football." Gerhardsson said that Sweden's last-gasp 2-1 victory over South Africa in the group stage had been a taste of things to come. "Physically, many (teams) have caught up. With better training, they can last 90 minutes and then there is the technical ability and the speed," he said.

'Real legacy'

Co-hosts New Zealand and Australia will regard the World Cup as a success on and off the pitch. Even before the last-16 stage concluded, nearly 1.4 million people had been through the turnstiles, making it the best-attended Women's World Cup. New Zealand won their first World Cup match ever — at the 16th attempt — with a 1-0 victory over former champions Norway in front of more than 42,000 at Eden Park in Auckland. That was a record crowd for a football match, men's or women's, in the country. Not all of the matches in New Zealand were nearly so well attended. Just under 7,000 watched Japan beat Costa Rica 2-0 in Dunedin on a chilly Wednesday evening and it remains to be seen if interest holds in rugby-mad New Zealand. In Australia, matches regularly drew bumper crowds and the country fell in love with the Matildas, the team's exploits making front- and back-page news. — AFP

'Nervous' Kane scores on Bundesliga debut; Bayern beat Bremen

BREMEN: England striker Harry Kane admitted he was "nervous" on his Bayern Munich debut, after scoring one and assisting another as his side won 4-0 at Werder Bremen in the season opener on Friday. Kane, who arrived in Germany on Saturday after a 100-million euro (\$109 million) move from Premier League side Tottenham, assisted on Leroy Sane's opener just three minutes in, before scoring midway through the second half.

Billed as the missing link one year after the German champions lost forward Robert Lewandowski, Kane connected play superbly on his Bundesliga debut, going close several times before his 75th-minute opener. Kane's goal snuffed out Bremen's second-half fight-back and opened the floodgates. Sane scoring another and French teenager Mathys Tel, who had replaced Kane, getting on the scoresheet in injury time to ensure Bayern finished the opening day in their usual place: atop the league table.

"It was a good night" Kane told broadcaster DAZN after the match. "We started well with a goal in the first few minutes." "I was a little bit nervous (and) excited to play the game of course. "For sure there were a few butterflies, but as always when I get on the pitch, instinct takes over." Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel praised his team's temperament, telling DAZN: "We stayed calm, patient, we didn't go crazy." "We had a very good game, from start to finish." Bremen manager Ole Werner blamed the "clear" loss on a poor start, telling the post-match press conference "we held back too much, we stood too deep." — AFP



BREMEN: Bayern Munich's English forward #09 Harry Kane (left) and Bremen's Austrian defender #32 Marco Friedl vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Werder Bremen and FC Bayern Munich. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adaliya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khaldiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital		Kaifan	24849807
	25312700	Shamiya	24848913
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shuwaikh	24814507
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Adan Hospital	23940620	Nuzha	22526804
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Qadsiya	22515088
Physiotherapy Hospital		Dasmah	22532265
	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401
Kaizen center	25716707		

Clinics

Change of Name

I, **Shabbar** s/o Fakhruddin Inayat Husain Jiwawala holder of Indian Passport No. Z3017154 having permanent address Mohammedipura Temba, Sagwara, Pincode No. 314025, Rajasthan, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: **Shabbar Fakhruddin** (Given Name) and **Jiwawala** (Surname). **18/8/2023**

I, **Ibrahim**, Passport No. Z3343992, do hereby change my name to **Ibrahim Sajjad Hussain** (new name) **Musaji wala** (as Surname) for all purposes. I will be known in the name **Ibrahim Sajjad Hussain Musaji wala** in future for all purposes. **(#3848) 18/8/2023**

I, **Yusuf** son of Shakir Husain holder of Passport No. M3185221, issued at Kuwait on 08/11/2014, permanent resident of Musalman Mohalla Dahi Dist. Dhar, M.P. 454331 - India and presently residing at Qibla, Block 9, Shohada Street Building 12, 1st Floor, Flat No. 4, Kuwait, do hereby change my name from **Yusuf** to **Yusuf Bohra** with immediate effect. **(#3847) 17/8/2023**

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Sweden claim third spot

Sweden spoil Australia World Cup party



FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2023

BRISBANE: Sweden players celebrate with their bronze medals after winning the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup third place play-off football match between Sweden and Australia on August 19, 2023. — AFP

BRISBANE: Sweden scored either side of half-time to spoil Australia's party and claim third spot at the Women's World Cup with a 2-0 win in Brisbane on Saturday. In front of a crowd of nearly 50,000, Sweden took the lead with a 30th-minute penalty by Fridolina Rolfö and doubled their advantage with a powerful strike from Kosovare Asllani just after the hour. It is the fourth time that Sweden have finished third at the tournament.

"It was an incredibly important match and the final 10 minutes were really tough," coach Peter Gerhardsson said. "So when that final whistle went and we had won, there was a great sense of relief and it was a wonderful feeling. "It's great to win a match of this magnitude — there's been a lot of attention paid to this tournament back in Sweden."

Sweden fully deserved their win against the hosts,

dominating the midfield and keeping talismanic Australian striker Sam Kerr relatively quiet. Australia's other dangerous attacker, Mary Fowler, had a night to forget as she struggled physically against the size and power of the Swedish defenders. By contrast, Sweden striker Stina Blackstenius caused havoc among the Australian defense during her 63 minutes on the pitch and had a hand in both goals.

Player of the match Rolfö said: "We showed from minute one that we were the better team. We deserved (to win) this match." Some of the Australian players were in tears at the end, but this was still the co-hosts' best World Cup ever. "We wanted to have some hardware to take home, it wasn't to be," said Kerr, who did not start a game at the tournament until the 3-1 semi-final defeat to England because of injury. The skipper attempted to look at the bigger picture,

saying: "We've proved to the world — and also within Australia — that we are a footballing nation."

The Swedes began with far more intent than the Matildas and dominated for most of the first period. Playing a bit like England in the semi-final on Wednesday, the Swedes slowed the ball down and controlled the midfield. Australia only really looked dangerous on the transition and for much of the time they were chasing shadows, struggling to get any meaningful possession.

The Swedes had a golden chance to take the lead in the first 60 seconds when Blackstenius shot low across goal. Australian goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold, who had another excellent night, parried the ball away and Ellie Carpenter did well to clear from in front of an open goal. The Matildas didn't have their first shot until the 24th minute when a Hayley

Raso drive drew a good save from Sweden keeper Zecira Musovic. But minutes later Sweden took the lead when VAR ruled that Clare Hunt had clipped Blackstenius's heel after yet another dangerous run into the box from the Swedish striker.

Australia coach Tony Gustavsson made an attacking change on the 60-minute mark, bringing on Emily van Egmond and Cortnee Vine, but it was Sweden who continued to control the match. They went some way to silencing the sell-out crowd when Blackstenius laid a ball across goal for Asllani, who smashed a powerful strike past a diving Arnold. It was their last contribution of the night as both were subbed almost immediately. Australia tried desperately to breach the Swedish defense in the last 20 minutes by lumping deep crosses into the box but Musovic was largely untroubled to keep a clean sheet. — AFP

Liverpool beat Bournemouth; Brighton go top

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool shrugged off a red card for Alexis Mac Allister on his Anfield debut to beat Bournemouth 3-1 on Saturday as Brighton thrashed Wolves 4-1 to go top of the Premier League. Bournemouth had lost 9-0 on their visit to Anfield a year ago but could not have wished for a better start. The Cherries had the ball in the net within seconds but Jaidon Anthony's tap-in was ruled out for offside.

Trent Alexander-Arnold's move into a midfield role resulted in a strong finish to a disappointing season for Liverpool last term, but he was guilty of giving the ball away for Antoine Semenyo's opener after only three minutes. Liverpool needed some inspiration to kickstart their season after a 1-1 draw at Chelsea last weekend. Luis Diaz provided it as he flicked up Diogo Jota's cross and then acrobatically fired an overhead kick into the bottom corner.

Jürgen Klopp's men led nine minutes before half-time, but Mohamed Salah needed a second opportunity to tap in the rebound after Neto had saved his penalty. The Egyptian has now failed to score three of his last five penalties, including one when Bournemouth won the last meeting between the sides in March. However, Salah's strike was enough to edge him ahead of Steven Gerrard as Liverpool's fifth highest scorer of all time on 187.

The momentum could have swung back Bournemouth's way when Mac Allister was harshly shown a straight red card for leading with his studs on Ryan Christie, despite minimal contact with the Scotland international. But the 10 men added to their lead within four minutes when Jota pounced after Neto could only palm Dominik Szoboszlai's effort into his path. Japan captain Wataru Endo was then introduced after Liverpool finally landed a defensive midfielder on Friday after losing out on Moisés Caicedo and Romeo Lavia to Chelsea.

Seagulls soar

Brighton banked a British record transfer fee that could rise to £115 million for Caicedo on Monday. But the Seagulls continue to soar under Roberto De Zer-



LIVERPOOL: Bournemouth's Hungarian defender #03 Milos Kerkez (left) and Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah chase the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Bournemouth on August 19, 2023. — AFP

bi despite seeing their best players picked off by the Premier League's elite. Kaoru Mitoma may be the next big-money departure and the Japanese international opened the scoring in stunning style at Molineux as he slalomed past four Wolves defenders before producing a classy finish. Wolves had thoroughly outplayed Manchester United despite losing 1-0 at Old Trafford on Monday.

But they had no answer to Brighton's speed of passing and movement as the visitors scored three times in the first 10 minutes of the second half. Mitoma teed up Pervis Estupinan to smash home for 2-0 before Solly March scored twice from Julio Enciso assists. Wolves pulled a goal back through Hwang Hee-chan, but a chastening afternoon for Gary O'Neil's men wiped away the optimism surrounding their performance at United. Brentford are also making light of the absence of the suspended Ivan Toney as they won 3-0 at Fulham.

Yoane Wissa pounced on an error from Issa Mbeumo to open the scoring just before half-time. Bryan Mbeumo doubled the Bees' lead from the penalty spot after Fulham captain Tim Ream was sent off for a second yellow card. Mbeumo then rounded off the scoring in stoppage time to lift Brentford up to second. Tottenham aim to get the Ange Postecoglou reign up and running later when they host Manchester United in their first home game since the departure of Harry Kane. — AFP

'Pick the right fight' for equality, FIFA's boss tells women

SYDNEY: FIFA president Gianni Infantino said Friday that women should "pick the right fights" to "convince us men what we have to do" to bring equality to football. Infantino was speaking in Sydney ahead of the Women's World Cup final on Sunday between Spain and England. "I say to all the women — and you know I have four daughters, so I have a few at home — that you have the power to change," he told FIFA's Women's Football Convention, to tepid applause.

"Pick the right battles. Pick the right fights. "You have the power to change, to convince us men what we have to do and what we don't have to do. You do it. Just do it." Norway's striker Ada Hegerberg responded to Infantino's comments on Twitter by writing: "Working on a little presentation to convince men. Who's in?" In his speech, Infantino added: "With men, with FIFA, you will find open doors. Just push the doors, they are open."

FIFA tripled the prize money on offer at this World Cup compared to 2019, and the total pot which also covers compensation for clubs releasing players is up from \$50 million four years ago to \$152 million now. Nevertheless, the prize pot still pales in comparison to the \$440 million dished out at the 2022 men's World Cup in Qatar. "This World Cup generated over \$570 million in revenue and so we broke even," said the 53-year-old Infantino.

"We didn't lose any money and we generated the second-highest income of any sport — besides of course the men's World Cup — at a global stage." He added: "This shows our strategy was not too bad, but of course we still have to do much better. "But we are on the right path." Infantino hit back at critics of the decision to expand the Women's World Cup to a biggest-ever 32 teams, up from 24 in 2019. There were fears the greater number of teams would mean some



BRISBANE: FIFA President Gianni Infantino (right) shakes hands with Sweden's goalkeeper #01 Zecira Musovic during the bronze medal ceremony after the end of the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup third place play-off football match between Sweden and Australia on August 19, 2023. — AFP

weaker sides and therefore some lopsided scorelines.

But the World Cup saw several of the higher-ranked teams dumped out early and Jamaica, Morocco and South Africa all reached the knock-out stage for the first time. "They were saying: it's not going to work, the level is too different, you will have 15-0 scores, it will be bad for women's football and its image," Infantino said of FIFA's move to expand the tournament to 32 teams. "But I'm sorry, FIFA was right, FIFA was right. "We had many countries around the world who thought they now have a chance to participate. "Everyone now believes there is a chance to shine on the global stage."

While standards have improved on the pitch and interest is at an all-time high, there remains a huge financial disparity between men's and women's football. In the build-up to the tournament, Infantino threatened a television blackout in five major European nations which was only resolved at the 11th hour. Infantino accused broadcasters of only offering between \$1 million and \$10 million to show the World Cup, compared to the \$100-200 million they pay for the men's version. Several nations were in open dispute before and during the World Cup with their federations over pay and conditions, including England, who put aside a row over bonuses to reach the final. — AFP