

Polestar 2  
Why wait  
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\$10,000 trade-in support



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# Assembly passes law to speed up building homes for citizens

## Lawmakers add housewives, widows to health insurance scheme

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly on Thursday unanimously approved a new housing law with the aim to accelerate the building of homes for Kuwaitis by allowing strategic foreign investors to participate without the need for a local agent. The government accepted the legislation and vowed it will take all necessary measures to implement it to resolve a decades-old problem of people who wait for as long as 15 years to get a house in a country where prices of land are beyond the reach of a majority of Kuwaitis.

During the debate, rapporteur of the Assembly

housing committee MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi said there are 25,000 empty plots in the country, 15,000 of which are owned by just 146 big traders. He said the average price of real estate in Kuwait is 13 times higher than the average income of Kuwaiti families and three times higher than Saudi Arabia and 2.5 times higher than in the United States. Saqabi said there are 92,000 housing applications of Kuwaiti families waiting their turn to get a house or a piece of land. The waiting period can exceed 15 years in some cases.

MP Jenan Bushehri said housing applications are increasing by the day and expressed doubt that all of them will be met. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said

the law will allow foreign investors to enter into this strategic sector, but expressed doubt that the state housing establishment is capable of implementing the law. A number of lawmakers said this law alone will not be able to resolve the housing problem and must be supported by other legislation, especially one securing financing and another ensuring enough land to build homes.

Over the past decades, the government of Kuwait has been using part of the oil windfall to build homes for citizens, because the overwhelming majority of them cannot afford to purchase their own houses due to extremely high prices of land. A 1,000-sq-m plot of land in

Kuwait City and neighboring areas can be sold for more than KD 1 million. It is slightly cheaper in remote areas.

The Assembly also unanimously approved another law to add new sections of Kuwaitis to a health insurance scheme that currently offers full health coverage to thousands of retired Kuwaitis. The amendments to the law add Kuwaiti housewives who receive public aid, Kuwaiti widows receiving public aid and divorced Kuwaiti women who receive government aid and who are at least 50 years of age. The amendments also allow the addition of new categories. The Assembly will hold a special session next Tuesday to discuss the government program of action.

## Finance ministry eyes excise tax instead of VAT

**KUWAIT:** Finance ministry sources said the application of value added tax in Kuwait during the current circumstances will be widely rejected at the popular and parliamentary levels. The government has excluded it from its plans during the next three years at least, indicating it will resort to the application of excise tax instead of VAT as its first choice for tax collection.

"The application of excise tax will include tobacco and its derivatives, soft and sweetened drinks and luxury goods such as watches, jewelry and precious stones, as well as luxury cars and yachts," sources revealed to Kuwait Times, pointing out the value of the proposed tax on these goods will range between 10 and 25 percent.

The sources added the government wants to apply VAT in accordance with its agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council countries, but it must be approved by the National Assembly, which is currently difficult in light of popular and parliamentary rejection. "With intensifying inflation fears, which have recorded historical levels in major industrialized countries, its effects bounce back to Kuwait and the region. Moving forward with such a type of tax in the present time may result in sharp rises in prices that cannot burden the consumer," sources added.

The sources reported in the event of the application of excise tax, the state treasury will earn around KD 500 million annually, noting it does not affect incomes of low- and middle-income people, as it targets luxury goods that are not considered to be basics for living. "It will also be applied to goods harmful to health as is the case in developed countries, given the government spends a lot of money on programs and treatments for cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes resulting from smoking, soft drinks, energy drinks and others," he said.

The Cabinet requested the ministry of finance develop tax administration across all key required areas, such as taxpayer readiness, human resources and training, communications, operations and information technology. It is worth mentioning that according to the Gulf agreement signed by Kuwait in November 2016, "excise tax will be applied to tobacco products of all kinds and forms, on energy drinks by 100 percent and soft drinks by 50 percent, while value-added tax has been set at 5 percent added to the value of goods at the moment of sale and collected for the benefit of the state treasury".

## Gulf summer feels hotter than usual

**DUBAI:** As much of the world swelters in record temperatures, spare a thought for Issam Genedi, who ekes out a living washing cars in one of the planet's hottest regions, the Gulf. Pausing from his work at an outdoor carpark in Dubai, the Egyptian migrant says the United Arab Emirates' furnace-like summer feels even hotter this year. "This summer is a little more difficult than other years," says Genedi, who shines cars for about 25 dirhams (\$6.80) a time in temperatures that pass 40 degrees Celsius each day. "Between noon and 3 pm or 3:30 pm, we simply cannot work."

The oil-rich UAE — host of this year's COP28 United Nations climate talks, where the world will try to sharpen its response to global warming — is no stranger to unbearable summers. In the blistering summer months, those who can decamp to cooler climes, or stay cocooned inside air-conditioned homes, offices and shopping malls.

The streets are largely deserted, apart from laborers hired cheaply from abroad. Many manual workers have a compulsory rest period in the hottest hours of the day. It's a similar story all around the energy-rich desert region. In Bahrain, July average temperatures threaten to beat the record of 42.1C set in 2017. In 2017 and 2020, Bahrain recorded an average monthly temperature of 36.9C in July.

Continued on Page 6



DUBAI: Workers line up in front of a water cooler on a hot summer day on July 12, 2023. — AFP

## Biden says Putin has 'already lost' Ukraine war

**HELSINKI:** US President Joe Biden said Thursday that Russia's Vladimir Putin has already lost the war in Ukraine, expressing hope that Kyiv's counter-offensive would force Moscow to the negotiating table. As Russia launched fresh strikes and a new bout of nuclear-saber rattling, Biden said there was no real prospect of Putin using nuclear weapons and insisted the war would not drag on for years.

Biden also used a visit to Finland, NATO's newest member, to pledge that Ukraine would one day join

the alliance, despite NATO leaders failing to give Kyiv a timeline at a key summit this week. "Putin's already lost the war. Putin has a real problem," Biden told a press conference with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto. "There is no possibility of him winning the war in Ukraine."

NATO leaders had dashed Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky's hopes for a clear timeline to join the military alliance, saying at this week's summit in Vilnius that they would offer an invite only when "conditions are met". But while Biden said no country could become a NATO member while it was at war — with Ukraine joining now meaning a "third world war" — he vowed Kyiv would one day join the club. "It's not about whether or not they should or shouldn't join. It's about when they can join, and they will join NATO," Biden said.

Continued on Page 6



HELSINKI: US President Joe Biden addresses a joint press conference with Finland's president after the US-Nordic leaders' summit on July 13, 2023. — AFP

## UN: 'End of AIDS' possible by 2030

**GENEVA:** "The end of AIDS" is still possible by 2030, the United Nations insisted Thursday, but cautioned that the world's deadliest pandemic could only be halted if leaders grasped the opportunity. "AIDS can be ended by 2030," the UNAIDS agency said as it outlined a roadmap of investment, evidence-based prevention and treatment and tackling the inequalities that are currently holding back progress.

UNAIDS said that ending the pandemic was, above all, a political and financial choice. "Success is possible — in this decade," said executive director Winnie Byanyima. The UN first set out in 2015 the target of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. Byanyima said the greatest progress on HIV — the virus that causes AIDS — was being made in the countries and regions that have invested strongly. She cited

eastern and southern Africa, where new HIV infections have dropped by 57 percent since 2010.

Botswana, Eswatini, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe have already achieved what are called the 95-95-95 targets. This means that 95 percent of those living with HIV know their status; 95 percent of those who know they have HIV are on life-saving anti-retroviral treatment; and 95 percent of people on treatment achieve viral suppression. At least 16 other countries are close to achieving the target. They include eight in sub-Saharan Africa — the region where 65 percent of HIV-positive people live — and Denmark, Kuwait and Thailand.

In a report, UNAIDS said that two decades ago, the global AIDS pandemic seemed unstoppable, with more than 2.5 million people acquiring HIV each year and AIDS claiming two million lives annually. But the picture is now dramatically different. "There is an opportunity now to end AIDS by increasing political will by investing in a sustainable response to HIV through financing what matters

Continued on Page 6

## EU urges keeping cats, dogs inside over bird flu fears

**PARIS:** The European Food Safety Authority called on Thursday for cat and dog owners to keep their pets inside in response to record cases of avian influenza across the world after 24 cats tested positive in Poland. Since first emerging in 1996, the H5N1 avian influenza virus had previously been confined to mostly seasonal outbreaks. But "something happened" in mid-2021 that made the group of viruses much more infectious, according to a World Health Organization collaborating center studying influenza in animals.

In rare cases, humans have contracted the sometimes deadly virus, usually after coming in close contact with infected birds.

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## Local

# France Embassy marks National Day, ambassador praises Kuwait relations

## Kuwait and France ministers discuss Schengen visa issue



Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher.  
— Photos By Yasser Al-Zayat



Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs cuts the cake with Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher.



Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs takes a photo with the Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher.

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher praised Kuwaiti-French relations, indicating the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah was fruitful, as he met French Minister of Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna and discussed many issues of common concern. She revealed that the Schengen visa issue was also discussed between the ministers. "I am happy to announce that a positive judgment was reached in Brussels in order to allow the 'CASCADE' visa mechanism for Kuwaiti citizens. It means that Kuwaitis will, hopefully soon, be given long-duration visas following their first demand of a Schengen visa," she said.

"Our minister raised the issues of family visas and driving licenses during the visit to Paris, so be sure that they are taken into account at the highest level, and we have received assurances that the Kuwaiti authorities will work quickly to lift these restrictions," she stressed. The French ambassador was speaking during a reception held on Wednesday on the occasion of the National Day of France. "This celebration is an unwavering commitment to the cultural heritage of France. We celebrate the French way of life, which has inspired countless poets, writers and thinkers throughout history," she said.

"This year, like last year, our joy is unfortunately

clouded by the unprovoked war in Ukraine launched by Russia, with its load of human rights violations which I have no doubt will be investigated by the International Criminal Court. We can only hope that this all stops as early as possible, with a victory of Ukraine. I know all Kuwaitis share this approach because they have experienced themselves the suffering of an invasion," she pointed out.

Le Flecher indicated France and Kuwait have a lot in common in their quest for regional stability, and they are engaged in promoting peace in the Middle East, notably for a viable solution for the Palestinian people. Regarding the meeting of the Kuwait and French minister of foreign affairs, she said: "The two ministers welcomed the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, hoping it will have positive effects on the situation in Lebanon and Yemen. Also, they encouraged the spirit of cooperation of the upcoming Bagdad III conference that will take place in Bagdad in the fall, which will promote regional connectivity and development."

Concerning trade between the two countries, she said the French and Kuwaiti ministers welcomed the vibrant economic relationship. "France has become the largest European client of the clean fuel project. Beyond trade, our long-lasting investment relationship is a testimony of the trust and the depth of interests that govern our relationship. Our historic cul-



The audience

tural and educational cooperation is also a testimony to our strong friendship," she said.

"The year was rich in events, such as the final of the World Cup and the month of La Francophonie, brought us together around festive events. The

Pearl of the West exercise, which saw the deployment of 500 French soldiers on Kuwaiti soil, and more recently the Arabian Breeze exercise, brilliantly illustrated the knowhow of our armies," Le Flecher added.

## Some criminals use mental health issues to gain empathy

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Many criminals in Kuwait attempt to use mental health issues as a legal defense to justify their crime, receive a lighter sentence and convince the judge that their mental issues affected their judgment or capacity to understand the consequences of their actions. Mental health issues can be considered as a mitigating factor, particularly if they contribute to criminal behavior. This recognition might lead to reduced sentences or alternative forms of rehabilitation.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, lawyer Mohammad



Mohammad Al-Jasem

Al-Jasem explained that in some cases, criminals may use mental health issues as a way to gain empathy, but evaluating the authenticity of such claims is the role of the legal system, which often involves mental health assessments and expert opinions. "Psychotherapy is not considered an excuse to attempt a crime.

A person goes through many psychological stages, but it does not count as a permit allowing him to commit crimes, and not a reason to be exempt from punishment. It is not that easy," he explained.

"However, it is possible to benefit from the decision to reduce the penalty for those who have a psychiatric

medical record and were in hospital to receive treatment because of their psychological condition. They may play this card, but it is a long process of proving how their health status was during the crime, and if it turns out that they committed the crime while in an unstable psychological state, then the verdict will be different, and they will be placed in psychiatry for a long period in order to work on their treatment and rehabilitation," Jasem added.

Jasem revealed that not every mental patient is qualified to escape punishment for their crime. "Mental criminals can be transferred to hospital instead of serving the punishment. Premeditated murder can reach life imprisonment, and if the murderer prepared their crime tool and was determined to commit the crime and did it, the sentence will be execution. If the crime was manslaughter such as traffic accidents, it will result in detention or fines," he said.

"The criminal is presented to sharia medicine and the file of the criminal is studied, their psychological



state, how severe the behavior was and what medications and treatments the patient took, and based on this the judgment will be made. Not many crimes are committed by mentally ill people because most of them are detained and receiving treatment, while most of those who claim they are mentally ill just want to escape punishment," Jasem pointed out.

## 'Mornings in Jenin' a poignant reminder of Palestinian suffering

Book review by Ghadeer Ghloom

**KUWAIT:** Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin* takes readers on a heartbreaking journey to explore the heavy history of Palestine and its people's suffering in exile. Through the eyes of Amal, the protagonist, Abulhawa narrates the profound impact of war and displacement on individuals and communities. The novel narrates the journey of the Abulheja family, who are forcibly displaced from their ancestral land in Palestine during the Nakba in 1948. From the destruction of their village to their physical and emotional exile in refugee camps in Jenin, the novel, published in 2010 by Bloomsbury, displays a deeply human version of the experience of statelessness and exile.



Susan Abulhawa, Author of *Mornings in Jenin*

One of the most remarkable strengths of Abulhawa's novel is the author's ability to meticulously portray the trauma, resistance and hope that exist within a community that refuses to submit and surrender. While at times the novel becomes heartbreaking with tragedy and sadness, Abulhawa balances such emotions with moments of love, activism, humanity and hope. Furthermore, the novel highlights a historical context of the Zionist occupation of Palestine, which pushes readers to reflect on the profound impact it has on the lives of the victims.

*Mornings in Jenin* is an important and powerful novel that highlights the marginalized perspective of individuals living in exile and wrestling identity crises. It is a thought-provoking read that challenges stereotypes and encourages humanity and understanding. This novel is a must read for anyone seeking to gain a deeper understanding of humans who suffer in silence on the margins of the world.

### Uncertainty and exile in *Mornings in Jenin*

Since the Zionist entity's dispossession of Palestinians and its occupation of their land, Palestinians became refugees who live in camps, which represent the unknown. In those camps, Amal, the protagonist, is born with an undefined identity that attaches uncertainty to her present and future life. Everything that defines her origins and ancestors is erased, except for a few pictures of her family and stories told by her father, a technique which the protagonist's daughter, Sara, later uses to keep Palestine and Palestinians from being forgotten and erased from world history.

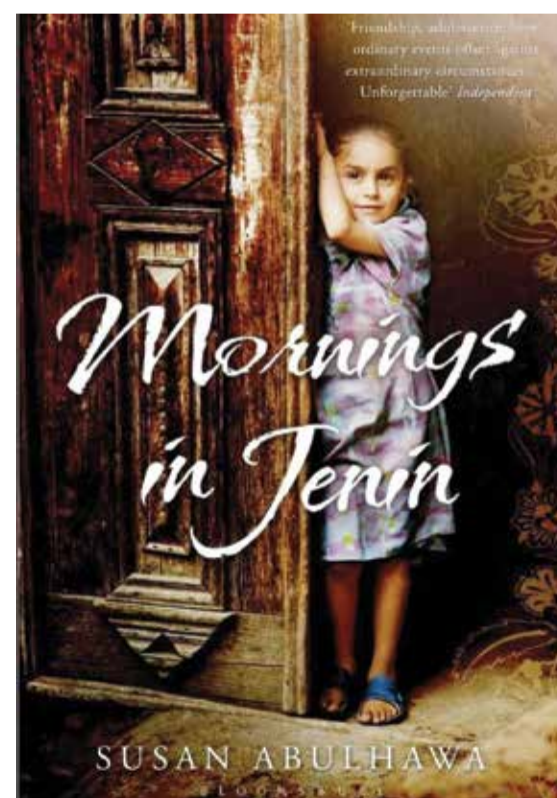
Statelessness deprives Amal of her identity and rights, which leaves her vulnerable to different forms of oppression. Being a refugee, Amal becomes part of undefined and oppressed community that the world, including non-refugee Palestinians, view as disadvantaged and look at with downward glances. Despite their anticipation for the world's help, Palestinian refugees are marginalized and betrayed by the world's lethargy towards defending them. No country wills to fully embrace their issue and take immediate action to protect them from statelessness and support their right to go back and live freely and safely in their stolen homeland. Not belonging anywhere leaves stateless Amal not only in physical exile, but also in a state of emotional exile as her identity splits into two parts after migrating to the US, one that is eastern - Palestinian - that holds her origins and history, but leaves her undocumented, and another that is western - American - which offers her documentation, but strange and emptied of her roots.

### The significance of education in *Mornings in Jenin*

The novel also portrays education as the string of hope for Palestinian refugees to compensate and rebuild their destroyed lives and identities. Amal lives the situation by seeking refuge in knowledge and receiving an educational degree, which rewards her with recognition and restores her value after it was shattered due to statelessness.

### Resistance in *Mornings in Jenin*

The novel presents different forms of resistance that Palestinians use to threaten their oppressors' dominance and prove their existence despite the Zionists' efforts to deny it. Mansour, the son of Amal's best friend, manifests an example of resistance in the novel. Despite his inability to speak due to his traumatic experience with Zionist forces, Mansour refuses to internalize his devaluation and submit to the



unfortunate reality of marginalization. With his artistic skills, he voices his oppression and frustration. He paints pictures of activists who died while demanding their rights, to keep them from being forgotten and erased from the world. Another example is Sara, who uses her intellect and writing skills to charge her website with writings about the Palestinians' oppression and exposes it to the whole world.

### A brief about the author: Who is Susan Abulhawa?

Susan Abulhawa is Palestinian American writer, who was born to refugees of the Six Day War of 1967. Her family's land was seized and the Zionist entity captured what remained of Palestine, including Jerusalem. She was born in Kuwait in 1970 before moving to the US as teenager. She graduated in biochemical science and established a career in medical science. In July 2001, Susan Abulhawa founded Playgrounds for Palestine, a non-profit dedicated to upholding the right to play for Palestinian children. *Mornings in Jenin* is her first novel.

## Kuwait's Nazaha partakes in GlobE Network meeting

**VIENNA:** Kuwait's Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) participated in the fourth meeting of the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network), which was held at the United Nations Headquarters in Vienna from 10 to 13 July. In a statement, the Nazaha stated that the network is a platform for exchanging information among government authorities concerned with combating corruption and provides the necessary knowledge, resources and tools to enhance international cooperation in investigations of cross-border corruption crimes.

The network is witnessing a continuous increase in the number of entities joining its membership from all over the world, as the number has reached 161 entities concerned with enforcing anti-corruption laws from 91 countries that are party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The statement also said that the Nazaha delegation participated in many discussions and technical sessions aimed at enhancing methods and techniques for exchanging information and how to use technology and innovation in preventing and combating corruption.

Nazaha affirmed its constant endeavor to deepen cooperation with countries and international organizations in order to eradicate the scourge of corruption and strengthen measures aimed at combating it through exchanging information on corruption crimes and sharing lessons learned and best practices in this field. — KUNA





Local

# Kuwait 'worst for expats'

## Gulf nation takes last in InterNations' 2023 Expat Insider ranking

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait is the worst country for expatriates to live and work in among 53 destinations, according to a recent report that gauges performance of countries based on parameters that include quality of life, ease of settling in, working abroad, personal finance and expat essentials. Kuwait ranks last in InterNations' 2023 Expat Insider ranking, following a trend of very poor performances across the past 10 years of the survey, the company's report indicates.

Kuwait had also finished in last place in last year's ranking as it performs poorly in most areas, according to InterNations founder Malte Zeeck. "Kuwait not only placed last in both 2022 and 2023, but it has consistently ranked among the worst-rated countries for the past decade," he said in an interview with Forbes.

The country ranks last globally for quality of life (53rd), the report reads, saying expats are especially unhappy with their leisure options. About half (49 percent) feel like they cannot openly express themselves and their opinions, more than triple the global average (15 percent), according to the report. The availability (47th), affordability (45th) and quality (46th) of healthcare also leave a lot to be desired, reads the report.

### Difficulty making friends

"Bottom three rankings in the local friendliness (52nd), finding friends (51st), and culture and welcome (53rd) subcategories lead to a last-place spot in the ease of settling in index (53rd)," the report explains. More than one in three expats (36 percent) find it hard to get used to the local culture (vs 18 percent globally), and only 37 percent are happy with their social life in Kuwait, compared to 56 percent

globally, the report says, adding, "Kuwait does not escape the bottom 10 in the working abroad index either (48th)." According to the report, three in 10 (30 percent) in Kuwait feel that they are not paid fairly for their job (vs 19 percent globally), and 45 percent say the local work culture does not support flexibility (vs 18 percent globally).

The report further indicates that Kuwait does not perform well in the expat essentials (40th) and personal finance (38th) indices: Just 34 percent are happy with the general cost of living (vs 44 percent globally). On the positive side, only 15 percent of expats in Kuwait struggle to find housing, compared to 31 percent globally, and more than half (54 percent) find it easy to live there without speaking the local language (vs 50 percent globally), the report points out. Overall, only 43 percent of expats are happy with their life in Kuwait, compared to 72 percent globally, says the report.

"The overall Expat Insider survey ranking is based on up to 56 different rating factors, and in 2023, Kuwait ends up in the bottom five of more than 30 of them," Zeeck says. "So, it's no wonder that only 43 percent of expats are happy with their life in Kuwait, compared to a global average of 72 percent, with the low level of general satisfaction also impacting Kuwait's final ranking overall."

### Bahrain best in GCC

Bahrain ranks as the best country for expats among GCC states on the list, and ninth overall, followed by the UAE (11th), Oman (12th), Saudi Arabia (28th), Qatar (31st) and finally, Kuwait (53rd). The 10th annual Expat Insider survey ranks Mexico as the best place to live for expats, followed by Spain,



**KUWAIT:** Foreign workers take shelter from the sun under a tree in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Panama, Malaysia and Taiwan, in order. Thailand, Costa Rica, Philippines, Bahrain and Portugal round up the top 10. The bottom 10 expat destinations are Japan, New Zealand, Malta, Italy, South Africa, Germany, South Korea, Turkey, Norway and Kuwait.

More than 12,000 expats participated in the In-

ternations' online survey representing 171 nationalities and living in 172 countries or territories worldwide. For a country to end up on the list, a sample size of at least 50 survey respondents must participate in any of the indices and the overall ranking. Only 53 destinations met this requirement for the 2023 index.



## Qatar navy student training ships dock at Kuwait port

**KUWAIT:** Training ships of the Qatari Mohammad Bin Ghanem Al-Ghanem Maritime Academy with navy students on board docked at Kuwait's Shuwaikh Port on a several-day-long visit. The visit comes in the context of the academy's student training programs and joint cooperation between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) navies with a view to sharing expertise and promoting joint coordination in educational and training domains, the Defense Ministry said in a press release. — KUNA photos



## NGO department organizes training course

**KUWAIT:** The Department of NGOs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association (KAAA) organized an accounting training course under the title "Financial Statements and their Importance" for competent employees in all sectors of the ministry as well as accountants at nongovernmental organizations.

Director of the Department of NGOs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Iman Al-Enezi stressed the keenness of the Ministry of Social Affairs to activate community partnership and cooperation between the government sector and NGOs within the framework of the regulations and systems in force. "The ministry of social affairs, represented by the department of NGOs, seeks to increase cooperation with all civil society institutions and NGOs and open



horizons for constructive and fruitful work in a transition of partnership between the public and private sectors," Enezi said.

"In cooperation with KAAA, we organized a training course aimed at refining the skills of employees specialized in various affairs' sectors and accountants at all NGOs under the title 'Financial Statements and their Importance'," she said, stress-

ing the need for concerted efforts between the ministry and NGOs by building bridges of cooperation to promote social work for the benefit of the country and citizens. She concluded her speech by thanking the board of directors of the Kuwait Association of Accountants and Auditors, which spared no effort in cooperating with the management of NGOs, calling for more cooperation in the coming periods.



**KUWAIT:** The Department of NGOs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association (KAAA) organized an accounting training course.

## Kuwaitization on track in co-ops

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Union of Cooperative Societies said that cooperative societies will start replacing expatriates with Kuwaitis, as part of the Kuwaitization of supervisory positions in cooperative societies, in addition to providing job opportunities for Kuwaitis.

Informed sources told Kuwait Times: "the Ministry of Social Affairs and all cooperative societies have previously set salary scales for Kuwaitis wishing to work in the supervisory positions, with the development of job guarantees that achieve job stability, especially in light of the fear of the possibility of sacking them in the event of changing boards of directors. The salaries that will be worked out are: KD 2,000 for general manager; KD 1,500 for deputy Director General in supervisory positions and KD 1,000 for heads of departments," sources revealed.

The Ministry also issued a number of ministerial decisions in the field of cooperative work, including "important amendments to the work regulation, organizational structure, appointment mechanisms and salary determination, and specified the conditions necessary for applicants to fill these jobs," sources said. "The Ministry of Social Affairs does not expect the success of total Kuwaitization of supervisory positions in all cooperative societies, before the end of this year, considering that there are many Kuwaitis who do not want to work in these areas. However, the ministry has set a time limit for associations during which they must finish the Kuwaitization process," the sources said, explaining that the cooperative societies sector is important and can provide thousands of jobs for Kuwaitis.

### News in Brief

#### Fishermen seek solutions

**KUWAIT:** The head of the Kuwaiti Federation of Fishermen, Zahir Al-Sawyan, confirmed that the shortage of local fish in the markets was not only caused by fishermen and fishing license holders, pointing out that despite officials' assurances of supporting the local product, the roads are blocked for workers in the fishing profession. Al-Sawyan said: "We have demanded through officially meet HH the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior in order to solve many of the difficulties facing the fishing sector, but unfortunately no date has been set, and the recruitment of fishermen and workers is still closed. Moreover, those who leave the country do find a better alternative. We demand our minimum rights."

#### Court rejects request

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Cassation Court rejected a request to release eight judges and a business man, along with other suspects and decided to look into the cases known as the 'Judges bribe'. Meanwhile, the verdict of the second case of the Bunaider Network in which Salehi, the Iranian, is accused will be on October 18th. The public prosecution indicted 10 judges and referred two others for disciplinary actions. Eight suspects were sent to the criminal court, while three lawyers, Salehi and 15 others are facing trial.

#### UNHRC decision hailed

**CAIRO:** Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmad Aboul-Gheit on Thursday welcomed the United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) decision condemning religious hatred like burning the Holy Quran. This decision renews responsibility all parties bear to publicly denounce calls for religious hatred including desecrating the sacred books and hold the perpetrators accountable. Aboul-Gheit said in a statement. He condemned, in the strongest terms, the permission of Sweden's authority on burning a copy of the Holy Quran by an extremist on the first day of Eid Al-Adha, holding them responsible for such acts, the statement said. — KUNA



## Novel speaks about Kuwaiti millionaire



**KUWAIT:** The "Prix de la littérature arabe" (Arabic literature award) was established in France in 2013, in partnership between Jean-Luc Lagardere and the Arab World Institute. It is one of the rare French prizes that distinguishes and appreciates Arab creativity that is translated into French. This year's novels focused on the huge wealth of Arab literature and the clear excellence the Arab novel has reached in a group of Arab countries including Kuwait, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

The novels' subjects are varied, covering various Arab issues that were distinguished by French translations that were well received by French readers, including Kuwaiti writer Taleb Al-Refae's novel "Kidnapping the Loved One", whose title the translator and publishing house decided should be "Gates of Paradise" in French. Refae said the novel was published by 14 Arab publishers in one week in most Arab capitals.

The novel speaks about the situation of a Kuwaiti millionaire Yaqoub, who living divided between the decline of his relationship with his wife Sheikha and being attracted to an Iranian girl Fernaz who is employed in his company, and finally his attachment to his son Ahmad, who left Kuwait to become a fighter with Islamist groups in Syria.

### Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** A man ride a bike under the shade of trees on the seafront of Kuwait City, as the country recorded extremely high summer temperatures.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# UK desires Kuwaiti investments in British technology: Minister

## Britain seeks to bolster mutual cooperation, partnerships

**KUWAIT:** A visiting British official has declared that London aspires to see Kuwait expand its enterprises in the United Kingdom to the technology field. Lord Dominic Johnson, Britain's Minister of State in the Department for Business and Trade, indicated in an exclusive interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that upon this aspiration, his current mission in the country mainly aims at bolstering mutual cooperation and partnerships to cover environmentally friendly technology.

Lord Johnson, in the interview of KUNA, shed much light on the existing business and investment cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the UK, underlining that the two countries are celebrating the 70th anniversary of opening Kuwait Investment Office (KIO) in London. The KIO, one of the

oldest of this level in the UK, has invested in many vital sectors, namely real estate and infrastructure, said the British minister of state.

In fact, the Kuwaiti office was the first of its kind to be established worldwide, Lord Johnson affirmed, adding that many states took lessons from the Kuwaiti business experience. Shifting to other aspects of the historical Kuwait-British relationship, dating back to early times of the past century, Lord Johnson said these ties have not been restricted to investments, also involving the arenas of defense and cyber security.

Moreover, the two countries share a joint vision with regard of regional and international affairs. Kuwait and Britain regularly examine issues of joint concern within framework of the steering committee

that meets every six months for this purpose. Regarding the UK-GCC negotiations on the free trade zone, third round of which were held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on March 23, Lord Johnson said the fourth round would be organized next week, noting that the planned talks would cover information security and transfer of commercial data, and not only issues related to exports and imports.

He indicated that the UK and the GCC would examine hurdles facing the mutual cooperation and facilitating personnel's movement among the involved countries. In conclusion, Lord Johnson expressed satisfaction at presence of many Kuwaitis in the UK for tourism and education and urged the Kuwaiti citizens who have not visited his country to go there to explore the nation's landmarks. — KUNA

## KUNA chief, Pakistan envoy discuss media cooperation

**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatima Al-Salem received Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Malik Farouq and discussed developing media cooperation Thursday. During the meeting, Dr Al-Salem stressed the need to develop relations between the two sides, especially in media. She noted that KUNA aims to develop its services and news bulletin and has a plan to expand in the east through activating previously signed agreements and memorandums of understanding with news agencies and media bodies in East, Central and South Asia countries, mainly the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), she added.

Moreover, Dr Fatima Al-Salem underlined the importance of sharing experience through joint training courses, in the light of the recent development in digital media. On his part, Ambassador Farouq said that media plays a big role in bringing nations and cultures together, while also shaping the countries'



**Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatima Al-Salem receives Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Malik Farouq. — KUNA**

foreign policies. He hailed KUNA's role in supporting Kuwait's foreign policy and diplomatic relations, hoping for further cooperation between the two sides in media, to keep up the strong political ties between Kuwait and Pakistan. — KUNA



**Bahraini Minister of Education poses for a photo with member states' representatives. — KUNA**



**Bahraini Minister of Education receives GASERC's Director.**

## GASERC playing a great role in GCC

**MANAMA:** Bahraini Minister of Education Mohammad bin Mubarak Juma praised on Thursday the efforts exerted by the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC) for developing Gulf educational policies. The minister added that GASERC plays a great role in considering the educational reality of the Gulf States

and providing proper opportunities for exchanging expertise in this regard.

During his meeting with GASERC's visiting Director Mohammad Al-Shareka, the Bahraini minister welcomed the member states' representatives partaking in the center's board meeting held in Bahrain on Wednesday. On his part, Al-Shareka expressed his gratitude to Bahraini Ministry of Education for its continued support and contribution to the center in executing its research programs and activities. Al-Shareka also praised the meeting which paved the way for closer cooperation between Bahraini Ministry of Education and the center. — KUNA



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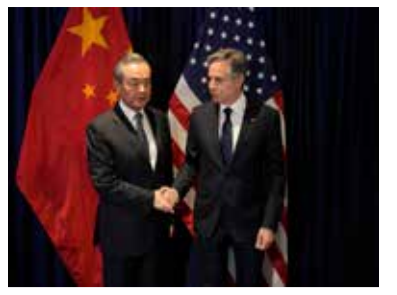
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Top US, Chinese diplomats meet at ASEAN summit

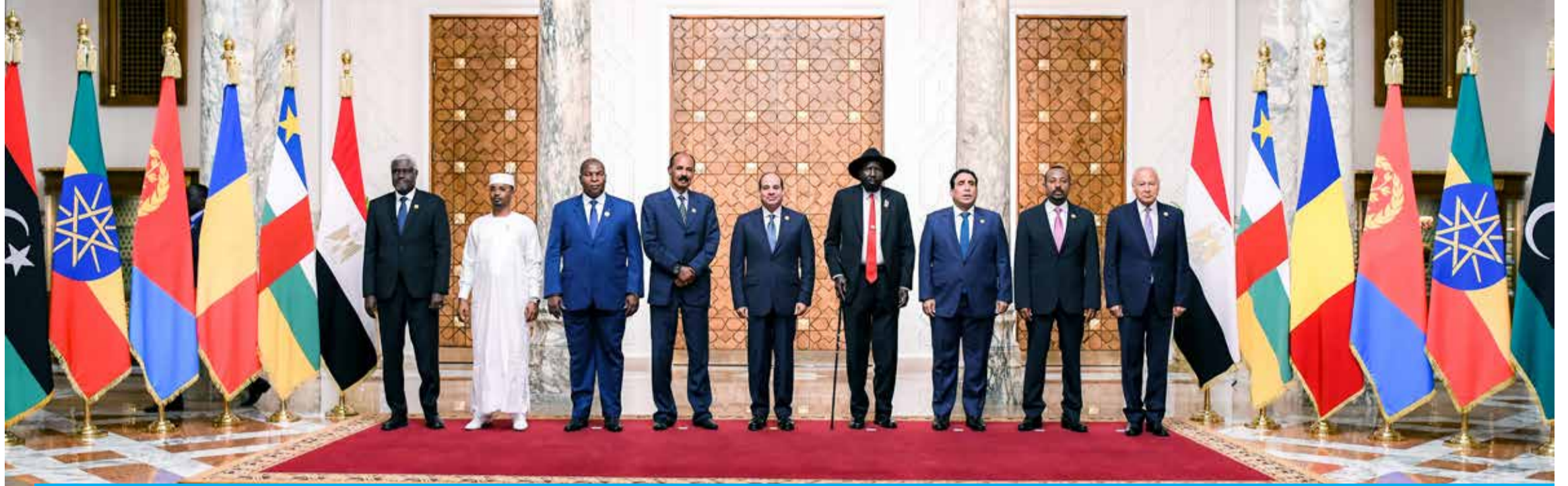
Military ties to take centre stage as Modi visits France

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## Sudan war summit urges calm

UN says 87 bodies buried in Darfur mass grave



CAIRO: This handout picture released by the Egyptian Presidency shows African leaders posing for a family photo during a regional summit for neighboring nations impacted by the three-month war between Sudan's rival generals at the presidential palace in Cairo on July 13, 2023. — AFP

CAIRO: A summit of African leaders from war-torn Sudan's neighbors Thursday urged an end to the fighting, as UN experts reported a mass grave had been discovered in the country's Darfur region. While Cairo hosted the crisis meeting on the nearly three-month-old conflict, gun battles, explosions and the roar of fighter jets again shook the Sudanese capital Khartoum, residents told AFP.

At least 3,000 people have been killed and millions have fled their homes in the war between Sudan's rival generals, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Leaders of Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Chad, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Libya as well as of the African Union and Arab League met in Cairo to discuss the war and its regional impact.

The United Nations has warned that Sudan's conflict risks spiraling

into "a full-scale civil war, potentially destabilizing the entire region". Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi hailed the "noble efforts" of Sudan's neighbors in "receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees with limited resources in an extremely difficult global economic situation".

He called on the international community "to honor the commitments" made last month when donors pledged \$1.5 billion in aid — less than half the estimated need for Sudan and its affected neighbors.

The summit called on both parties to secure corridors for urgently needed aid, even as Sudan's humanitarian crisis deepened. Hundreds of people were seen queuing for drinking water in Wad Madani, 200 kilometers (130 miles) south of Khartoum, and a 24-hour electricity blackout darkened most of the country overnight.

### 'Denied decent burial'

Since the war erupted on April 15 between Sudan's army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, nearly 724,000 people have fled abroad, according to the International Organization for Migration. The Chadian president, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, said that within "just one week, Chad received more than 150,000 people, most of them women and children fleeing the violence".

The IOM says 240,000 people have escaped to Chad from Sudan's western region of Darfur, where entire towns have been ransacked. The UN's human rights office OHCHR on Thursday reported new evidence of atrocities in the region. It said the bodies of at least 87 people allegedly killed by the RSF and its allies between June 13-21 were buried in a mass grave in the West Darfur capital of El Geneina near the Chad border. Some of the victims belonged to the non-Arab Massal-

it ethnic group, while seven women and seven children were among the dead, the office said, adding that the RSF were "denying those killed a decent burial".

### 'Humanitarian disaster'

Sudan's neighbors — many already mired in economic and political crises — have feared a widening regional spillover since the conflict began. The president of Egypt, a close ally of the Sudanese army, said that over 250,000 Sudanese had fled to the northern neighbor, "joining around five million Sudanese citizens who have lived in Egypt for many years". Human Rights Watch said Thursday that thousands more Sudanese are "stranded in dire humanitarian conditions" on the border, and urged Cairo to "rescind its entry visa rule" which was recently toughened.

Central African Republic's president, Faustin-Archange Touadera, warned of growing "small arms smuggling" across

his country's "porous border" with Sudan. "There are severe shortages of food and fuel," he said, warning of an impending "humanitarian disaster".

The Cairo summit follows multiple efforts to broker an end to the violence and repeated US and Saudi-brokered ceasefires that were all violated. East African regional bloc IGAD held talks Monday in Addis Ababa calling on the warring parties to "sign an unconditional ceasefire".

The Sudanese army boycotted the gathering, after Khartoum's foreign ministry objected to Kenyan President William Ruto's leadership of the IGAD quartet because it accuses Nairobi of siding with the RSF. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called Thursday for diplomatic efforts to "align with the IGAD-African Union process", while African Union Commission head Moussa Faki Mahamat urged a "political process without foreign interference". — AFP

## EU, Japan talk cooperation on raw materials

BRUSSELS: The EU and Japan are working on a cooperation agreement for raw materials to whittle down China's dominance in the sector, leaders said in Brussels on Thursday. Coordination also extended to semiconductors, to help boost economic security in Japan and the EU, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

The three spoke in a joint media conference after holding a brief, two-hour summit held in the wake of a NATO summit in Lithuania this week that all three leaders had attended.

Their meeting touched on a range of issues, with some — notably on questions of security — addressed through the prism of Japan's current role chairing the G7 group of advanced, Western-oriented nations. North Korea's launch of a solid-fuel intercontinental missile on Wednesday was condemned, with Michel saying it and Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program "threaten regional and international security".

"We condemn this in the strongest possible terms," he said. Von der Leyen said the EU and Japan were launching a "strategic dialogue" to coordinate on the "unprecedented challenges to peace

and security" in the Asia-Pacific, which she said included the issue of economic security.

Russia's war in Ukraine — also condemned by the leaders — showed how various supply chains can be disrupted, she said. When it came to the raw materials fueling their economies, the EU and Japan "share similar dependencies," she said.

"One of our objectives is to reduce over-reliance on a handful of suppliers, many of them based in China, for products that are vital for our economies," von der Leyen said. Michel said that "over history, we've seen the abuse of dominant positions and this causes difficulties". Kishida agreed on the need for cooperation, though did not directly name China as the reason. "We welcome this direction (with the EU), as like-minded countries and partners will provide supply-chain and critical infrastructure resilience," he said. "It's important that Japan and the EU and like-minded countries coordinate and respond with one voice to economic security as well as towards de-risking," Kishida said.

### Semiconductors, AI

He added that, in supply chains for computer chips, "we are working together on the advanced skills for the semiconductor industry". The trio also discussed cooperation on artificial intelligence, with von der Leyen saying they wanted to ensure that AI products they developed did not fall into the hands of other countries that could use them for military ends.

Japan's big domestic win at the Brussels summit was the European Union immediately dropping import restrictions on Japanese food imports from the



BRUSSELS: (From left) European Council President Charles Michel, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pose during a press conference as part of the 29th EU-Japan Summit at The European Union Building in Brussels on July 13, 2023. — AFP

Fukushima region, which was affected by the March 2011 nuclear accident that occurred there. The commission said that, based on data supplied by Japan, there was no public health threat to European consumers who ate plants, fish and mushrooms from Fukushima, which up to now had been banned.

Brussels, though, urged Japan to continue to monitor fish and seaweed close to the plant for radioactivity. "We're happy that the EU made the decision to lift import restrictions on Japanese food," Kishida said, adding that "this was based on science". — AFP

## BBC restarts probe into sex pictures scandal as star named

LONDON: The BBC on Thursday resumed an internal inquiry after its star news anchor was revealed as the man at the centre of a sex pictures scandal, following days of fevered speculation about his identity.

Huw Edwards, 61, was dramatically named on Wednesday in a statement by his wife, six days after The Sun daily reported claims that an unnamed presenter had paid a young person £35,000 (\$45,000) for sexually explicit pictures.

The family of the young person claimed they had used the money to fuel a crack cocaine addiction but the now 20-year-old dismissed the allegations as "rubbish". Six days of fevered social media speculation led other high-profile media figures to rule themselves out, with one urging the presenter to come forward to prevent others being "falsely accused".

Putting an end to the guessing game as the BBC's 6pm bulletin went on air, Edwards' wife Vicky Flind confirmed his identity "primarily out of concern for his mental well-being and to protect our children".

She said the father-of-five was "suffering from serious mental health issues" and had been admitted to hospital "where he will stay for the foreseeable future".

The publicly funded broadcaster had paused its own investigation into the claims against Edwards at the request of police. But the BBC's "fact-finding investigations" resumed after two police forces — London's Metropolitan Police and South Wales Police — said there was no evidence a criminal offence had been committed.

### 'Inappropriate messages'

BBC director general Tim Davie promised staff in a note that "due process" would be followed and said the corporation's "immediate concern is our duty of care to all involved". Media commentators are now debating the ethics of The Sun publishing the original story, given that the alleged victim rejected the claims and said they had told the tabloid not to publish.

There has also been discussion about the unregulated free-for-all on social media, while traditional media outlets were bound by strict privacy and defamation laws. The BBC meanwhile reported that two more people — an employee and a former employee — had come forward with complaints of "inappropriate messages" from Edwards, including some "late at night and signed off with kisses." — AFP

## Iran's Raisi visits fellow outlier Zimbabwe

HARARE: Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa on Thursday urged nations targeted by Western sanctions to band together as he hosted the leader of fellow international outlier Iran.

President Ebrahim Raisi arrived for the last leg of the first Africa tour by an Iranian leader in 11 years, on a tour aimed at easing the Islamic republic's international isolation. Raisi is the highest profile leader to visit Zimbabwe in the thick of an election campaign for a closely-watched August 23 presidential and parliamentary vote. "It is critically important that we, the victims of Western sanctions, are talking to each other... that we show them that we're united," Mnangagwa told a press briefing after talks with Raisi. "I am happy you have come to show solidarity," Mnangagwa told Raisi on arrival, calling him "my brother".

Mnangagwa, 80, who is seeking re-election in what analysts predict will be

a tense ballot, has long blamed his country's dire economic straits on sanctions imposed by the United States and European Union.

Western countries retort that the measures target specific individuals accused of graft and human rights abuses rather than the whole country. Africa has emerged as a diplomatic battleground, with Russia and the West trying to court support over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which has had a devastating economic impact on the continent, sending food prices soaring. Western powers have also sought to deepen trade ties with Africa, along with India and China.

Hundreds of people waving Zimbabwean and Iranian flags had gathered at Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare during the morning to greet Raisi. Many were from the southern African country's Muslim community, including women wearing



HARARE: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (center) inspects the guard of honor upon his arrival for a state visit at the Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport in Harare on July 13, 2023. — AFP

headscarves and school children holding welcome banners.

The two leaders signed "a record" 12 agreements on topics ranging from energy to telecommunications, Mnangagwa said. These will help Zimbabwe access innovation and technology from Iran and envisage the creation of

a tractor factory to support agricultural, he added. Raisi's visit comes with Iran stepping up diplomacy to reduce its isolation and offset the impact of crippling sanctions reimposed since the 2018 withdrawal of the United States from a painstakingly negotiated nuclear deal. — AFP



## International

# Military ties to take centre stage as Modi visits France

## India PM set to unveil purchases of 26 Rafale jets, 3 Scorpene-class submarines

PARIS: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi began a two-day visit to France on Thursday where he will attend the traditional Bastille Day military parade as guest of honor and discuss major new defense deals.

Greeted by his French counterpart Elisabeth Borne at Orly airport outside Paris, he stepped off his official plane to military honors, ahead of a sumptuous dinner at the Louvre museum with President Emmanuel Macron and a traditional firework display. France's red-carpet welcome for the Indian leader comes weeks after Modi was given the rare honor of a White House state dinner in Washington—a city he was once banned from visiting.

Despite differences over the war in Ukraine and tensions over human rights in India, New Delhi and Western democracies are keen on deepening ties because of mutual concerns about China.

"India is one of the pillars of our Indo-Pacific strategy," an aide to Macron told reporters this week on condition of anonymity. Macron has made Modi guest of honor for the July 14 military parade, which kicks off France's national day celebrations, with the participation of Indian troops and Indian-flown French-made fighter jets underlining close defense ties.

India is one of the biggest buyers of French arms, with Modi announcing a landmark deal for 36 Rafale fighter jets during a trip to Paris in 2015 that was worth around 4.0 billion euros (\$4.24 billion) at the time.

He is set to unveil the purchase of another 26 marine versions of the state-of-the-art aircraft during this visit, as well as a deal for three Scorpene-class submarines, according to reports by the Tribune news website in France and the Hindustan Times newspaper in India. New Delhi is seeking to rapidly modernize its armed forces, with fears about China's assertiveness heightened by simmering disputes along its Himalayan frontier.

### Rights concerns

Modi has visited France four times since Macron came to power in 2017, while Macron was feted on a state visit to New Delhi in 2018. Aides on both sides

have talked up the personal chemistry between the two leaders and pointed to cooperation on climate change and solar, space technology and nuclear power, as part of the 25-year-old "strategic partnership" between France and India.

Modi told French newspaper Les Echos that bilateral trade had doubled in the last nine years and Macron's "thinking really matches ours". India and France "are naturally compatible" and "we see France as one of our foremost global partners," Modi added.

But the 72-year-old Indian leader remains a controversial figure at home and in the West, dating back to his tenure as chief minister of the western state of Gujarat in 2002 when around 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in sectarian riots. He has been dogged by allegations that he was complicit in the violence and was once subject to a US State Department travel ban over his role. Indian government probes have cleared him of culpability.

Since his first crushing electoral victory in 2014, Modi has regularly been denounced by rights groups for increased discrimination and violence towards the country's Muslims, as well as stifling independent media. Leading French academic Christophe Jaffrelot said Modi was "in the process of deconstructing India's democratic institutions" in an article published this week.

And organizers said a central Paris protest on Thursday afternoon would include a giant head representing Modi declaring "I hate democracy". But few observers expect Macron to raise rights concerns publicly. "The fact that explains France's relative success in this relationship is that unlike the US, the UK, Canada, Germany and a few other European countries, you've hardly seen France commenting on the internal affairs of India," Constantino Xavier from the Centre for Social and Economic Progress, a New Delhi-based think tank, said this week.

"That has been appreciated on the Indian side."

### Balancing game

India has also become a vital market for Western

held fears among the Kuki that the Meitei might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups.

The resolution noted that "intolerance towards minority communities has contributed to the current violence and that there have been concerns about politically motivated, divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism in the area." "The Manipur state government has also shut down internet connections and severely hindered reporting by the media, while security forces have been implicated in the recent killings, something that has further increased distrust in the authorities," it said. It called for independent investigations and a lifting of internet shutdowns.

It added that "human rights must be at the heart of the partnership between the European Union and India, including in trade relations". MEP Pierre Larrourou, the text's chief negotiator, said the local government of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was "fanning the flames of conflict".

"By authorizing the armed forces to fire on civilians and cutting off Internet services, the BJP is using the local violence to further discriminate against non-Hindu minorities", he said. Larrourou called Modi's invitation to the parade in Paris "an affront not only to India's minority communities, journalists and human rights defenders, but also to India as a democracy". Manipur is part of India's remote northeast, a region linked to the rest of the country by a narrow land corridor. — AFP



PARIS: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and France's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne (right) walk past French Republican Guards at the Orly airport in Orly, Paris' suburb, on July 13, 2023. — AFP

companies, its swelling middle classes helping the economy to be the fifth-biggest in the world. Many European and American businesses including US tech giant Apple are also ramping up production in India to mitigate the threat of supply chain disruptions from China. The war in Ukraine has heightened concerns in the West about the risk of conflicts disrupting the flow of key raw materials and technology from China, but it has also exposed a rift with India. New Delhi, which has long sought to balance its ties with Moscow and

the West, has declined to condemn Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and has emerged as a top buyer of discounted Russian oil during the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II.

"This has been a major stumbling block for the India-Europe partnership," said Garima Mohan, an Indian foreign policy expert at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a think tank, during an online debate at the Brookings Institution this week. — AFP

## EU urges India to end violence in Manipur state

STRASBOURG: The EU parliament on Thursday urged India to end violence and protect minorities in the country's northeastern Manipur state, criticizing "nationalistic rhetoric" it said was adding to tensions. It came as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi began a two-day visit to France, where he will attend the traditional Bastille Day military parade as guest of honor.

MEPs expressed concern over clashes between Manipur's majority Meitei, who are mostly Hindus and live in and around the state capital Imphal, and the mainly Christian Kuki tribe in the surrounding hills.

The EU parliament said that the violence has "left at least 120 people dead, 50,000 displaced and over 1,700 houses and 250 churches destroyed". MEPs called out "nationalistic rhetoric" and the parliament adopted a resolution on Thursday urging Indian authorities to "promptly halt the ethnic and religious violence and to protect all religious minorities".

The Kuki community had protested Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action. This also stoked long-

## Spain poll outcome risks raising Catalan tensions

BARCELONA: Spain's right, in power during Catalonia's failed 2017 secession bid, is trying to regain ground in the vote-rich region ahead of this month's early general election with a more conciliatory tone. But a return to power for the conservative Popular Party (PP), which is leading in the polls, risks reigniting separatist tensions—especially if the party needs the support of far-right Vox to govern.

PP leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo has visited Catalonia multiple times before the July 23 vote and has vowed to be the head of government of "all Catalans".

The northeastern region, one of Spain's richest whose capital is Barcelona, accounts for 48 seats in the country's 350-seat parliament. The PP, which adopted a hard line against Catalonia's separatist push, held only two of these 48 seats in the outgoing assembly and has room to grow in the region.

Feijoo vowed during an interview published in daily newspaper El Mundo on July 2 that if he becomes prime minister, he will tell the separatists still



BARCELONA: Protesters wave Spanish and Catalan Senyera flag while holding a sign reading "38 per cent is not Catalonia" in reference to a referendum voter turnout during a pro-unity demonstration in Barcelona on October 29, 2017. — AFP

in power in Catalonia that he is "available to talk". The tone contrasts with that of former PP prime minister Mariano Rajoy who was in power in 2017 when the Catalan government pushed ahead with a banned independence referendum, and then issued a short-lived independence declaration. Rajoy responded by abolishing Catalan autonomy, while the region's leaders either fled abroad or were arrested and later sentenced to lengthy jail terms. — AFP

## Gulf summer feels hotter...

Continued from Page 1

Two weeks ago, more than 1.8 million Muslims battled through a days-long hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia in temperatures up to 48C, with thousands treated for heat stress. And in Kuwait, which regularly records some of the world's highest temperatures, experts warn the mercury could pass a formidable 50C in the coming weeks.

Kuwaiti meteorologist Issa Ramadan said "the increase in temperature over the past year has been significant". "It is expected that from the middle of the month until August 20 there will be a noticeable rise in temperatures that may reach and even exceed 50C (122F) in the shade," he told AFP. Humidity could top 90 percent in Bahrain by the end of the week, with maximum temperatures ranging between 42-44C, according to official forecasts.

Genedi is right that this summer seems unusually hot. Apart from last week being identified as the hottest ever recorded worldwide, a wave of humidity has been suffocating the Gulf. "People have been left wondering if the temperatures are even higher" than usual, Ahmed Habib of the UAE's National Centre of

Meteorology told AFP. "An increase in relative humidity... combined with already high temperatures, makes the temperature seem higher than it really is," he said, adding that 'real-feel' temperatures have ranged between 55-60C in some areas.

The Gulf's extreme heat and high humidity are a dangerous mix as in such conditions the human body struggles to cool itself by evaporating sweat on the skin. The combination is measured by a thermometer wrapped in a wet cloth to calculate the "wet bulb temperature" — the lowest possible through evaporative cooling.

The Gulf is one of the few places to have repeatedly measured wet bulb temperatures above 35C, the threshold of human survivability beyond which heat stress can be fatal within hours, regardless of age, health and fitness. It is for this reason that experts warn accelerated climate change will make parts of the Gulf region unlivable by the end of this century.

Gulf temperatures will rise to disruptive levels if global warming is left unchecked, according to projections by Barrak Alahmad of the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health and Dominic Roye of the Foundation for Climate Research. In the UAE's capital Abu Dhabi, the number of 40C-plus days will rise by 98 percent by 2100 if global temperatures increase by 3C, according to the findings published in June by Vital Signs, a coalition of rights groups working on migrant laborer deaths in the Gulf. — AFP

which has led to a 58 percent drop in new infections in children.

Around 1.3 million people became newly infected with HIV last year — down 59 percent from the peak in 1995. Meanwhile 630,000 died from AIDS-related illnesses. "Overall, numbers of AIDS-related deaths have been reduced by 69 percent since the peak in 2004," the report said. "The end of AIDS is an opportunity" for today's leaders to be remembered as "those who put a stop to the world's deadliest pandemic", said Byanyima. "We are hopeful, but it is not the relaxed optimism that might come if all was heading as it should be. It is, instead, a hope rooted in seeing the opportunity for success, an opportunity that is dependent on action."

Funding for HIV fell back in 2022 to \$20.8 billion — around the same level as in 2013, and well short of the \$29.3 billion needed by 2025. The HIV pandemic continues to impact key populations more than the general population, UNAIDS said. — AFP

## Biden says Putin has 'already lost'...

Continued from Page 1

Moscow's riposte to the NATO summit came in the form of its latest aerial assault on Ukraine, injuring four people, while Kyiv said it had destroyed 20 Russian attack drones and two cruise missiles. In a sign of its anger at Western backing for Kyiv, Moscow said it would regard F-16 fighter jets sent to Ukraine as a "nuclear" threat because of their capacity to carry atomic bombs. "Russia cannot ignore the ability of these aircraft to carry nuclear weapons. No amount of assurances will help here," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted as saying by the Russian foreign ministry.

But Biden played down the latest bout of nuclear rhetoric from Russia. "I don't think there's any real prospect... of Putin using nuclear weapons. Not only has the West but China and the rest of the world has said don't go there," he said. Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin should meanwhile be careful of poisoning following the mercenary group's failed uprising in Russia, Biden added.

"God only knows what he's likely to do. We're not even sure where he is and what relationship he has. If I were (him), I'd be careful what I ate. I'd keep my eye on my menu," Biden said in Helsinki. Biden also said he was "serious" on the prospect of a prisoner exchange for jailed Wall Street Journal reporter Evan

Gershkovich to get him home from Russia.

The US president was holding talks in the Finnish capital after G7 powers vowed to back Ukraine for as long as it takes to beat Russia. Finland, which shares a 1,300 km border with Russia, ended its historic military non-alignment and joined NATO following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Biden and the leaders of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden pledged "unwavering" support for Ukraine in a joint statement after the talks. They also discussed climate, which Biden called the "only existential threat humanity faces".

Biden is the first US president to visit Helsinki since Donald Trump's summit five years ago with Putin, and his press conference took place in the same hall. He pledged that the United States would remain a member of NATO, after being asked about what would happen if Trump, who mooted pulling out of the alliance, is re-elected next year. But Biden's stress on the strength and symbolism of NATO contrasted with events at the NATO summit, when Zelensky slammed the "absurd" decision not to fast-track Ukraine's membership. Instead, G7 nations later offered Ukraine a package of long-term security commitments, involving bilateral deals between Kyiv and the world's richest nations. Zelensky insisted the promises amounted to a "significant security victory" but did not disguise the fact that he would have preferred a timetable for Ukraine. In Kyiv, recently-supplied Western weapons systems were insufficient to cover the whole country, the spokesman for Ukraine's air forces Yuriy Ignat said after the overnight strikes. — AFP

## UN: 'End of AIDS' possible by...

Continued from Page 1

most: Evidence-based HIV prevention and treatment, health systems integration, non-discriminatory laws, gender equality, and empowered community networks," the report said.

UNAIDS said that in 2022, 39 million people globally were living with HIV, of whom 29.8 million were accessing anti-retroviral therapy. Those missing out include 660,000 children. The numbers on anti-retroviral treatment have near quadrupled from 7.7 million in 2010. Furthermore, 82 percent of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV had access to anti-retroviral treatment in 2022, compared to 46 percent in 2010 —

H5N1 viruses in wild birds has been confirmed."

In recent weeks, five dogs and a cat have been infected in Italy. Since June 10, 24 cases have been reported in domestic cats in various regions of Poland. The source of the contamination has not yet been determined, with one hypothesis being that they may have ingested raw poultry meat infected with the virus. In April, the United States started testing several vaccine candidates for potential use on birds. France recently said it hopes to start vaccinating poultry as early as autumn this year. Christine Middlemiss, the UK's chief veterinary officer, said that vaccinating poultry was not "a silver bullet because the virus changes constantly". — AFP

## EU urges keeping cats, dogs inside...

Continued from Page 1

The virus has also been detected in a soaring number of mammals. "It is recommended to avoid exposure of domestic cats and dogs, and in general carnivore pets, to dead or diseased animals," EFSA said in a bulletin. "Possible measures are keeping dogs on a leash, and confining cats indoors in areas where extensive circulation of



## International

# Top US, Chinese diplomats meet at ASEAN talks as tensions risk flaring

## Blinken-Wang meeting takes place despite Chinese hacking allegation

JAKARTA: The top US and Chinese diplomats met Thursday for the second time in as many months, seeking to manage tensions that risk flaring anew over alleged Chinese hacking. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Wang Yi, China's top foreign policy official, saw each other on the sidelines of Association of Southeast Asian Nations talks in the Indonesian capital. "Director, good to see you," Blinken told Wang with a smile as they shook hands before US and Chinese flags at a Jakarta hotel. The two then went into talks with their aides and made no comments to assembled reporters.

The meeting went ahead despite Microsoft saying two days ago that Chinese hackers had breached US government email accounts, including those of the State Department. The Jakarta talks come nearly a month after Blinken travelled to Beijing, the first visit by a US secretary of state in nearly five years, and met President Xi Jinping as well as Wang and Foreign Minister Qin Gang.

Wang, who leads the foreign affairs commission of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, is representing China at the Jakarta talks among foreign ministers because Qin is ill, the foreign ministry in Beijing said. Blinken's Beijing trip opened a flurry of diplomacy, with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visiting the Chinese capital last week and a trip by climate envoy John Kerry set for the coming days. But the United States has still not achieved its key goal of resuming dialogue with the Chinese military, seen as critical to avoiding confrontation.



JAKARTA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) shakes hands with Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China's Central Committee Wang Yi during their bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Jakarta on July 13, 2023. — AFP

Tensions between the world's two largest economies have soared in recent years over a host of issues including China's growing assertiveness in the region and sweeping restrictions imposed by the United States on exports of advanced semiconductors.

US officials fear China is readying plans to invade Taiwan, the self-governing democracy Bei-

jing claims as its territory, and want to preserve the status quo that has existed, often uneasily, for nearly five decades.

### 'Productive coexistence'?

Neither the United States nor China has predicted breakthroughs from the renewed diplomacy but both have spoken of making sure that disagreements do not lead to outright conflict. Blinken spoke in unusually sanguine terms about China after his trip to Beijing, avoiding the Cold War-like talk of a long-term global confrontation with the rising Asian power that was popular under former president Donald Trump's administration.

"At least in the near term, maybe even in the lifetimes of most people in this room, I don't think (there is) a clear finish line," Blinken said of US goals in China during a recent appearance at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. "This is more about getting to a place where we have peaceful and maybe somewhat more productive coexistence between us."

But incidents have repeatedly crept up to overshadow the relationship.

Microsoft said this week a Chinese hacking group had gained access to nearly 25 organizations with the goal of espionage. The State Department said it detected "anomalous activity" but stopped short of publicly blaming China, saying an investigation was underway. Blinken's first plan to visit Beijing was scuttled in February after Washington said it detect-

ed a Chinese espionage balloon over the mainland United States.

### Tensions on sea, Myanmar

The South China Sea has been a major topic at the ASEAN talks in Jakarta, where Washington and Beijing will both take part in an 18-nation East Asia Summit with foreign ministers on Friday.

China claims almost the entirety of the strategic waterway and several ASEAN members complain about Beijing infringing on their own overlapping territorial claims. Wang addressed ASEAN ministers before talks Thursday morning as did Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who will be in the same room as Blinken on Friday for the East Asia Summit meeting. It will be their first encounter since a brief March meeting in India but no bilateral talks are expected between the two diplomats as Moscow's widely condemned invasion of Ukraine grinds on.

ASEAN members also met jointly with the foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, a dialogue in place since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The crisis in coup-racked Myanmar that has divided ASEAN members has been high on the agenda in the Indonesian capital, with the Southeast Asian bloc divided over how to engage the country's junta rulers. Thailand's foreign minister said on Wednesday he met ousted Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi last week and Bangkok has sought engagement with Myanmar's junta, drawing criticism that it is undercutting ASEAN efforts. — AFP



JAKARTA: Leaders pose for a family photo in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Post Ministerial Conference with South Korea during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Jakarta, on July 13, 2023. — AFP

## Divided ASEAN struggles to reach Myanmar stance

JAKARTA: ASEAN foreign ministers were still working for a united position on the Myanmar crisis Thursday, a day after the bloc's ministerial meeting ended. Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since a military coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, unleashing a bloody crackdown on dissent. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations chair Indonesia had on Wednesday urged a political solution to the crisis at two-day foreign minister talks.

More than two years after the coup, the divided 10-member bloc's peace efforts remain fruitless, as the junta ignores international criticism and refuses to engage with its opponents. By Thursday, ministers had still not agreed on a communique. A Southeast Asian diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a joint text was still being worked out.

A second diplomat attending the meetings told AFP on condition of anonymity the delay was because "they are working on the language on Myanmar" and a joint communique could arrive as late as Friday. An early draft seen by AFP on Tuesday had left a section on Myanmar blank, as the group wrangled over its content and language. The second diplomat said some countries want outright re-engagement with the junta, while others are pushing for a five-point plan agreed two years ago with Myanmar's rulers to remain the basis for re-engagement. This confirmed the "deep divisions within ASEAN on the Myanmar issue", the diplomat added.

### Thai dialogue track

Thailand has launched a separate track to the ASEAN efforts, speaking directly with the Myanmar junta and other actors in the conflict. Last month, Bangkok hosted the junta's foreign minister for controversial "informal talks" that further split the bloc.

Then on Wednesday, on the second day of ASEAN talks, Thailand's top diplomat announced that he met last week with Suu Kyi—who has been detained since the coup, and jailed by a junta court for a total of 33 years. Don Pramudwinai said he met the Nobel laureate on Sunday in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw and said she was in "good health" and "encouraged dialogue".

Don "freely discussed what he wanted" with Suu Kyi, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said in an audio statement posted by the military's information team Thursday, adding that her health was "good".

On Thursday, Don told reporters: "It has been two years now, (and) not much improvement. So there must be re-engagement with Myanmar."

### 'Safe, stable, prosperous'

Indonesia has said any other efforts must support ASEAN's existing five-point peace plan to end the violence and renew talks. The Southeast Asian diplomat who spoke to AFP said ASEAN members would support Thailand's initiative, "provided it served the purpose of complementing the chair's role".

Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir told reporters that all members were working towards the "same issue", which was ensuring that Southeast Asia was "a region that is safe, stable and prosperous". Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said Jakarta had engaged in "quiet diplomacy" with all sides of the conflict, and in its seven months as chair had held more than 110 engagements concerning Myanmar. — AFP

## Thai reformist Limjaroenrat loses PM vote

BANGKOK: Thailand's parliament on Thursday rejected election winner Pita Limjaroenrat's bid to become prime minister. After hours of discussions but a surprisingly swift voting process, Pita failed to secure the 375 parliamentary votes needed to become Thailand's 30th premier, despite his reformist party winning the popular vote in the general election.

The political challenger rode a wave of support in May that saw voters emphatically reject almost a decade of army-backed rule under Prayut Chan-o-cha, who took power in a 2014 coup. But the outcome had become increasingly inevitable, with signs conservative MPs of the lower house and junta-appointed senators would not give him their support. Ahead of the



BANGKOK: Move Forward Party Leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat speaks to the media in Thai Parliament after the parliamentary vote for the premiership in Bangkok on July 13, 2023. — AFP

## North Korea says conducted new test of solid-fuel ICBM

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un personally oversaw the successful test of the country's newest intercontinental ballistic missile, state media reported Thursday, days after Pyongyang threatened to down any US spy planes that enter its airspace.

A beaming Kim, flanked by his wife and key aides, was shown in state media images applauding enthusiastically after the launch of the solid-fuel Hwasong-18 on Wednesday. The ICBM, which North Korea has fired only once before, in April, flew 1,001 kilometers at a maximum altitude of 6,648 km before splashing into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The launch was a "grand explosion" that shook "the whole planet", KCNA said. State media footage showed the missile blasting off into the sky. Kim vowed that "a series of stronger military offensive" would be launched until the United States and South Korea change their policies towards North Korea, the agency added. Citing the "unstable situation" on the Korean peninsula, Kim also called for "more intense efforts" to boost North Korea's nuclear arsenal.

The confirmation of the launch—which the South Korean military had reported on Wednesday—came with relations between the two Koreas at one of their lowest points ever.

Diplomacy is stalled and Kim has called for ramping up weapons development, including tactical nukes. In response, Seoul and Washington have boosted security cooperation, vowing that Pyongyang would face a nuclear response and the "end" of its current government were it to ever use its nuclear weapons against the allies. — AFP



This picture taken on July 12, 2023 and released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on July 13, 2023 shows the test firing of a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) "Hwasong-18" at an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (left) and his wife Ri Sol Ju (center obscured) applauding the test firing of a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) "Hwasong-18" at an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP

## North Korea's Kim pictured with foldable phone

SEOUL: When North Korean leader Kim Jong Un guided the launch of his country's newest and most powerful ballistic missile this week, a shiny gadget lay on his table: a foldable smartphone.

Photos released by the official Rodong Simmun newspaper on Thursday showed what looked like a silver foldable handset in black leather casing, strikingly similar to Samsung's Galaxy Z Flip devices or China's Huawei Pocket S phones. The photo from Wednesday's launch of the solid-fuel Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) instantly unleashed speculation about where the phone came from.

"If the object in the photo is a foldable phone, it is highly likely that it was secretly smuggled to North Korea via China," South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper reported. North Korea is banned under UN sanctions from importing or exporting electronic devices. Kim's love for gadgets has been an object of outside curiosity in the past. He has been pictured using what appeared to be Apple products, including iPads and Macbooks. Only around 19 percent of the North Korean population are estimated to have access to mobile phones, according to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook. — AFP

## China's top diplomat says Beijing, Moscow to deepen ties

JAKARTA: China's top diplomat said Thursday Beijing would strengthen ties with Russia in areas of strategic communication and coordination, as the allies' contacts grow closer after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year. Beijing says it is a neutral party in the war but its refusal to condemn the invasion has led many of Kyiv's allies to accuse it of favoring Russia after emerging as Moscow's most important ally in its current bout of international isolation. Wang Yi met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting in Jakarta, where both will take part in an 18-nation East Asia Summit ministerial meeting Friday.

"The two sides should... strengthen strategic communication and coordination," Wang was quoted as saying by the Chinese foreign ministry in a statement. "China and Russia firmly support each other in safeguarding legitimate interests, adhere to the path of harmonious coexistence and win-win development."

Wang was representing Beijing in the Indonesian capital because Foreign Minister Qin Gang was ill, the foreign ministry said on Tuesday. Lavrov said Moscow and Beijing were maintaining "high-level exchanges" and a March meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Russia had "injected strong momentum into bilateral relations", the Chinese ministry's readout said.

"We have more and more areas where interests and plans converge, so I am looking at further development with optimism," Lavrov said, according to a Russian foreign ministry statement. — AFP

parliamentary vote, nearby highway overpasses had razor-wire placed on them, while the parliament compound was ringed by containers designed to deter demonstrators, a sign of the tensions around the event.

Only three years ago, massive pro-democracy protests erupted in Bangkok after a court dissolved Pita's Move Forward Party's predecessor, the Future Forward Party. "We Thais have the right to voice our opinions since we're a democratic country," said MFP supporter Patchaya Saelim, 17, outside parliament ahead of the vote. "We can gather to protest." The path forward remains unclear, with the house speaker yet to indicate if Pita can try again to secure the necessary votes. Following May's election, he cobbled together an eight-party coalition totaling 312 votes, still short of the needed 375. His bid was sunk by the senators, the vast majority of whom voted against him, which raises questions about whether another round would end in a different result. MFP's reformist agenda—including suggestions to amend the country's strict royal defamation laws—has drawn objections from conservatives and the country's powerful establishment. — AFP



## Business

FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2023

## Musk launches xAI to rival OpenAI

## Google launches ChatGPT rival Bard in EU, Brazil

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk on Wednesday launched his own artificial intelligence company, xAI, as he seeks to compete with OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT — a program he accuses of being politically biased and irresponsible.

The xAI website said the Tesla tycoon would run the company separately from his other companies but that the technology developed would benefit those businesses, including Twitter.

"The goal of xAI is to understand the true nature of the universe," the website said.

Musk on Twitter added that the new company's aim was to "understand reality" and answer life's biggest questions. The startup is staffed by former researchers from OpenAI, Google DeepMind, Tesla and the University of Toronto.

The team is to be advised by Dan Hendrycks, who currently leads the Center for AI Safety, a San Francisco-based organization that warns against developing AI too quickly. Hendrycks also initiated the open letter to global leaders in June that warned AI was a risk to human existence on par with pandemics and nuclear war. Musk has repeatedly warned about the dangers of AI, having called it "our biggest existential threat," and saying that moving too fast was like "summoning the demon."

He has claimed to have cofounded OpenAI in 2015 because he regarded the dash by Google to make advances in artificial intelligence as reckless. He left OpenAI in 2018 to focus on Tesla and later said he was also uncomfortable with the profit-driven direction the company was taking under the stewardship of CEO Sam Altman. Musk also argues that OpenAI's large language models — on which ChatGPT depends on for content, as is the case with other AI programs — are overly politically correct.

Musk in April shared details of his plans for a new AI tool called "TruthGPT" in an interview with Fox News, the conservative broadcaster. In the interview

he said his new AI company would come very late after OpenAI and Google DeepMind, both of which have made great strides in recent years.

"I think I will create a third option, although it's starting very late in the game. Can it be done? I don't know, we'll see," he said. The launch of an AI company on the scale of OpenAI or Google DeepMind would come at an enormous expense, especially in regards to the necessary semiconductors, known as GPUs, which are mainly built by California company Nvidia.

Meanwhile, Google launched its AI chatbot Bard in the European Union and several more nations on Thursday, entering a key market in its race against Microsoft-backed ChatGPT after a delay over data privacy concerns.

The US firm unveiled Bard in February but postponed its June release in the 27-nation EU following queries by the Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC), as Ireland is home to the European headquarters of US tech giants. In addition to the EU, Bard was rolled out in Brazil and about a dozen other countries on Thursday.

Bard is "now available in most of the world, and in the most widely spoken languages," Bard's product lead Jack Krawczyk and vice president Amarnag Subramanya wrote in a blog. As part of our bold and responsible approach to AI, we've proactively engaged with experts, policymakers and privacy regulators on this expansion," they said.

The company said it would incorporate user feedback and take steps to protect people's privacy and data as it broadens access to Bard. Graham Doyle, the spokesman and deputy commission of the Irish data privacy watchdog, said Google had planned to make Bard available in the EU in June but paused it following the DPC's queries.

Ahead of Thursday's launch, Google made a "number of changes" including "increased transparency and changes to controls for users," Doyle said



in a statement. "We will be continuing our engagement with Google in relation to Bard post-launch," he said. "Google have agreed to carrying out a review and providing a report to the DPC after three months of Bard becoming operational in the EU."

He noted that the European Data Protection Board set up a task force earlier this year to look at issues related to AI. Italy blocked ChatGPT for a month in March over privacy concerns.

**Excitement and concerns**

Google is seeking to catch up to rival Microsoft, which has rushed to integrate ChatGPT-like powers in a wide array of its products, including the Bing search engine. With Thursday's rollout, Bard can now be used in over 40 languages including Arabic, Chinese, German, Hindi and Spanish. It was previously available in three languages — English, Japanese and Korean.

Google also announced new features, including receiving audio responses from Bard or answers in five different styles: simple, long, short, professional or casual. Another new feature allows users to upload photos that Bard can analyze for information. The rise of AI has raised both excitement and concerns about its potential to improve or replace tasks done by humans. AI tools have shown in recent

months the ability to generate essays, create realistic images, mimic voices of famous singers and even pass medical exams, among a slew of uses.

But there are also worries about the possibility that chatbots could flood the web with disinformation, that biased algorithms will churn out racist material, or that AI-powered automation could lay waste to entire industries.

**'Extinction' fears**

Experts — even the founder of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, Sam Altman — have warned about the potential existential risks that the technology poses to humanity.

Altman and dozens of other specialists signed a statement in May urging global leaders to reduce "the risk of extinction" from AI. But the warnings have not stopped the rapid development of AI.

Tesla and Twitter owner Elon Musk, who has issued his own warnings about the risks, launched an AI company named xAI on Wednesday. The xAI website said Musk would run the company separately from his other companies but that the technology developed would benefit those businesses, including Twitter. Last month, the European Parliament backed a draft law that will be the basis for the world's first comprehensive rules for AI. — AFP

## British economy falters as growth outlook darkens

LONDON: The UK economy shrank in May on an extra public holiday for the coronation of King Charles III, official data showed Thursday, and as high inflation prolongs a cost-of-living crisis. The outlook darkened as the government's fiscal watchdog warned public debt — already ballooning on pandemic spending and energy subsidies — would rocket further in the coming decades.

Gross domestic product slid 0.1 percent in May after rising 0.2 percent the previous month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. Output slid as businesses downed tools for the extra holiday, but the performance beat market expectations for a deeper decline of 0.3 percent. "GDP fell slightly as manufacturing, energy generation and construction all fell back with some industries impacted by one fewer working day than normal," said ONS economic statistics director Darren Morgan.

**Hot inflation**

Activity remains under strain also from aggressive interest-rate hikes as the Bank of England's (BoE) attempts to dampen hot consumer prices. UK annual inflation unexpectedly held at 8.7 percent in May.

The BoE has ramped up interest rates 13 times in a row to the current level of five percent, in turn increasing commercial loan costs for businesses and consumers. "While an extra bank holiday had an impact on growth in May, high inflation remains a drag anchor on economic growth," noted finance minister Jeremy Hunt.

"The best way to get growth going again and ease the pressure on families is to bring inflation down as quickly as possible." The government has sought to fend off high-pay demands from public sector work-



LONDON: Britain's gross domestic product slid 0.1 percent in May after rising 0.2 percent the previous month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

ers, notably health staff and teachers who have carried out vast strike action this year.

The government, however, announced Thursday it had accepted recommendations from independent pay review bodies for salary increases of between 5.0 and 7.0 percent in the public sector. The ONS added Thursday that the economy was just 0.2-percent larger than its pre-pandemic level, meaning it has almost flatlined over the past four years.

**'Listless'**

"May's GDP figures demonstrate that the economy remains listless and that the recovery signalled by many of the business surveys... has not taken hold yet," said Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "Looking ahead, we continue to think that the economy will regain a little momentum in the second half of this year, led by a pick-up in households' real expenditure."

\$74.91/b. The front-month ICE Brent/NYMEX WTI spread widened to average \$4.71/b in June. The futures forward curves of ICE Brent, NYMEX WTI and DME Oman weakened during the month, and hedge funds and other money managers heavily cut bullish positions in ICE Brent and NYMEX WTI, extending the previous month's selloffs. World economic growth in 2023 remains broadly unchanged at 2.6 percent and the initial forecast for 2024 economic growth is expected at 2.5 percent.

US economic growth for 2023 is revised up slightly to stand at 1.4 percent, followed by 0.7 percent for 2024. Euro-zone economic growth for 2023 is revised down slightly to stand at 0.7 percent, while growth in 2024 is forecast at 0.8 percent. Japan's economic growth for 2023 is revised up slightly to 1.1 percent, while growth in 2024 is forecast at 1.0 percent. China's 2023 economic growth remains at 5.2 percent, with economic growth forecast in 2024 at 4.8 percent. India's economic growth remains at 5.6 percent in 2023 and is expected to expand by 5.9 percent in 2024. Brazil's economic growth in 2023 is revised up to 1.3 percent and is expected to grow by 1.1 percent in 2024.

Russia's economic growth in 2023 is revised up to 0.4 percent and a further recovery is anticipated for 2024 with a growth forecast of 0.8 percent. OECD Americas is revised up slightly to account for a bet-

ter-than-expected performance in the US in 2Q23. Similarly, OECD Europe is revised up slightly in 1Q23. In the non-OECD, demand was also revised upward to account for bullish oil demand seen in China in 2Q23 and a slight improvement in Latin America over the same period.

For 2024, world oil demand is forecast to grow by a healthy 2.2 mb/d, reaching about 104.25 mb/d. The OECD is anticipated to expand by 0.26 mb/d, with OECD Americas contributing the largest increase. The non-OECD is set to drive growth, increasing by almost 2.0 mb/d, with China, the Middle East and other Asia accounting for the bulk of this growth, with further support from India, Latin America, and Africa. World Oil Supply Non-OPEC liquids supply is expected to expand by 1.4 mb/d in 2023, broadly unchanged from the previous month's assessment.

The main drivers of liquids supply growth for 2023 are expected to be the US, Brazil, Norway, Canada, Kazakhstan and Guyana, while the decline is expected mainly in Russia. There remain uncertainties related to US shale oil output potential and unplanned maintenance in 2023. For 2024, non-OPEC liquids production is expected to grow by 1.4 mb/d. The main drivers for liquids supply growth are expected to be the US, Canada, Guyana, Brazil, Norway and Kazakhstan, while the largest declines are expected in Mexico and Azerbaijan. — KUNA

## France expands trade ties with UAE and Qatar

DUBAI: Trade ties between France and Gulf Arab states, namely Qatar and the UAE, are expanding year-on-year, France's trade minister told AFP on Thursday, praising the deepening partnership as "good news". During a visit to the United Arab Emirates, Olivier Becht said trade ties between the UAE and France totaled more than 7 billion euros per annum, up from 6 billion euros before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade with Qatar has almost doubled over the same period to more than 4.6 billion euros, mainly because of higher French imports of Qatari liquefied natural gas, he said. "We have not only restored the (trade) figures that were recorded before the pandemic, but also improved them, and this is good news," Becht told AFP in Dubai, two days after he held meetings in Doha.

Last year during a visit by Emirati President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to



DUBAI: France's Minister for Foreign Trade Olivier Becht gives an interview in Dubai on July 13, 2023. — AFP

Paris, the UAE and France signed a strategic agreement to cooperate in the energy sector, including in hydrogen, renewable and nuclear energy. "The main areas of cooperation" with Qatar and the UAE, Becht said, include energy transition. He singled out electric vehicles, green hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel as main areas of focus. French-Qatari trade ties have been boosted by a strong energy partnership, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked an energy supply crisis, the trade minister said.

"We have a long-term partnership with Qatar in many fields, especially in the field of energy," Becht said. "We will still be using gas in the next few years," he added, arguing that the energy transition will take a long time. Earlier on Wednesday, Becht met UAE Foreign Trade Minister Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi. "Trade ties between the UAE and France are growing fast," Al-Zeyoudi said afterwards, adding that non-oil bilateral trade in 2022 grew by more than 20 percent from 2021. — AFP

## OPEC expects world oil demand to grow 2.4 mbpd in 2023

VIENNA: World oil demand is expected to grow by 2.4 million barrel per day (mbpd) in 2023, following an upward revision of about 0.1 mb/d from last month's assessment, mainly due to higher demand seen in China in 2Q23. In its monthly report, OPEC added, "based on the initial world oil demand and non-OPEC supply forecast for 2024, demand for OPEC crude is expected to reach 30.2 million barrel/daily, 800,000 higher than the 2023 level."

Demand for OPEC crude in 2023 is revised up by 100,000 barrel from the previous month's assessment to stand at 29.4 million barrel/daily, the report noted. This is around one million barrel/daily higher than in 2022. The OPEC Reference Basket (ORB) declined 0.8 percent, m-o-m to average \$75.19/b in June.

The ICE Brent front-month contract fell 0.9 percent, m-o-m to \$74.98/b, and the NYMEX WTI front-month contract declined by \$1.35, or 1.9 percent, m-o-m to average \$70.27/b. The DME Oman front-month contract rose 0.2 percent, m-o-m to settle at



## Business

# Doctors walk out in British health service's biggest strike

## Strike comes against backdrop of a crippling cost-of-living crisis in UK

**LONDON:** Hospital doctors in England on Thursday staged the biggest walkout in the history of the UK's state-funded National Health Service, prompting fears for patient safety.

The unprecedented five-day stoppage over pay and staff retention is the latest in eight months of industrial action across the NHS, which is already reeling from a vast pandemic backlog.

"The NHS has been running on goodwill and now this is the last chance to change that," said 27-year-old junior doctor Arjan Sing, on a picket line outside London's University College Hospital. He said colleagues were planning to leave for countries that "care about their doctors". "Doctors have realized they work in a global market, they're not restricted to this country," he added.

Nurses, ambulance staff and other medical workers have all joined picket lines in recent months, adding to pressures on patient appointments. The industrial action by junior doctors — those below consultant level — will run until 7 am (0600 GMT) on Tuesday.

It comes against a background of walk-outs across the economy from train drivers to lawyers over the past year as the UK battles a crippling cost-of-living crisis. Senior hospital doctors, known as consultants, in England will also begin a 48-hour strike on July 20, with radiographers following suit from July 25.

### 'Destructive'

The bitter row between junior doctors and the government has seen them call for their 2008-9 pay levels to be restored — something the government says would mean an average pay award of about 35 percent. The British Medical Association's Junior Doctors Committee says medics have effectively had a 26-percent pay cut in real terms in the last 15 years, as salaries have failed to keep pace with soaring inflation.

The government claims that backdating their pay to reflect inflation since 2008 is too costly and has instead offered an extra five percent, as it battles to reduce inflation.

"Today marks the start of the longest single walkout by doctors in the NHS's history, but this is still not a record that needs to go into the history books," BMA leaders Robert Laurenson and Vivek Trivedi said. "We can call this strike off today if the UK government will simply follow the example of the government in Scotland and drop their nonsensical precondition of not talking whilst strikes are announced and produce an offer which is credible to the doctors they are speaking with."

Similar stoppages in June and April resulted in massive disruption with hundreds of thousands of hospital appointments and operations rescheduled. "The complete inflexibility we see from the UK government today is baffling, frustrating, and ultimately



**LONDON, UK:** Junior doctors hold placards at a picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital in London on July 13, 2023 in the biggest walkout in the history of the UK's state-funded National Health Service. — AFP

destructive for everyone who wants waiting lists to go down and NHS staffing numbers to go up," Laurenson and Trivedi added. About seven million

people were waiting for treatment in April — a record — with nearly three million waiting more than 18 months, according to the BMA. — AFP

## China exports plunge in June, deepening economic woes

**BEIJING:** Chinese exports tumbled more than expected in June, official data showed Thursday, putting fresh pressure on Beijing to unveil more stimulus measures to kickstart the flagging recovery. Overseas shipments are a key pillar of growth in the world's second-largest economy but apart from a brief rebound in March and April, they have declined since October owing to weak demand in key markets.

The 12.4 percent drop released by the General Administration of Customs was an acceleration from May's 7.5 percent and worse than the 10 percent fall predicted in a survey of economists by Bloomberg. Imports also fell 6.8 percent over the same period, reinforcing concerns about softening domestic demand, which has seen inflation plateau and force the central bank to ease monetary policy, putting pressure on the yuan.

Customs spokesman Lyu Daliang also pointed to outside forces having a "direct impact" on Chinese trade, with Beijing engaged in a long-running standoff with the United States on a number of issues including trade and technology. "The risks linked to unilateralism, protectionism, and geopolitics are on the rise," he said in a statement with the figures.

The threat of recession in the United States and Europe has led to lukewarm demand for Chinese

products. And weak economic data in developed countries "will put more pressure on Chinese exports" in the coming months, warned economist Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management.

China's trade surplus reached \$70.2 billion last month, against \$65.81 billion a month earlier.

Thursday's figures are the latest in a series of grim indicators reflecting a loss of steam in China's post-COVID recovery, with factory activity contracting and growth in the services industry slowing, while industrial production remains tepid. — AFP



**BEIJING:** People use an umbrella as they walk past a Lego store on a rainy day in Beijing on July 13, 2023. — AFP

## IEA trims demand forecast as interest rates weigh on growth

**PARIS:** The IEA trimmed its forecast for 2023 oil demand for the first time this year as macroeconomic headwinds including higher interest rates bite, but still sees it reaching a record level thanks to China's thirst for fuel.

The International Energy Agency now sees oil demand rising by 2.2 million barrels per day (mbd) this year, down from its previous forecast of an increase of 2.4 mbd. Nevertheless, the Paris-based organization which unites energy consuming nations, expects global demand to hit a record 102.1 mbd this year. China will account for 70 percent of the global demand increase even though the rebound in its economy has appeared to falter.

"China's oil demand remained robust despite rising unemployment, renewed property market stress and a general slump in business and consumer sentiment," said the IEA in its regular monthly report on

oil markets. But it warned overall "world oil demand is coming under pressure from the challenging economic environment, not least because of the dramatic tightening of monetary policy in many advanced and developing countries over the past twelve months."

Central banks in leading industrial nations have jacked up interest rates in an effort to bring down inflation, but the higher borrowing costs suppress economic activity and risk provoking recessions that would lead to a drop in oil demand. Such concerns have kept crude prices in check even though Saudi Arabia and fellow OPEC cartel nations along with their allies have limited or even cut output for the past year. Their cuts have been largely offset by higher output from other producers, with oil supply still outpacing demand.

But the IEA warned "the oil market may soon see renewed volatility" as demand outpaces supply.


It noted global supply could tumble by more than 1 mbd this month as Saudi Arabia implements steeper cuts. An IEA graph forecasts the oil market shifting from balance in the second quarter to demand outstripping supply for the rest of the year, with the draw on stocks hitting roughly two million barrels per day in the coming months. — AFP

Ricardo Evangelista. "The markets can now see a path for a soft landing of the US economy, with inflation being controlled without the country... entering a serious recession."


Traders already had a spring in their step this week on signs that the US central bank's monetary tightening measures were kicking in. The mood brightened Wednesday when the US Labor Department said the consumer price index came in at 3.0 percent in June, the lowest since March 2021 and sharply down from 4.0 percent in May. The Fed's target is two percent.

On top of that, the "core" rate, which excludes the volatile food and energy components and is seen as a better sign of underlying inflation, sank to its lowest since 2021. The readings follow last week's better-than-hoped personal consumption expenditures data — seen as the Fed's preferred gauge — and stoked bets that it will hike just one more time before calling it quits.

Analysts also pointed out that, while showing signs of softness, the labor market was still robust and the economy remained in good health. Asian stocks powered higher following the positive trading session on Wednesday on Wall Street, with Hong Kong climbing more than two percent and Tokyo over one percent. Hong Kong's tech giants were among the Hang Seng Index's best performers on hopes that China's crack-down on the sector is near an end. — AFP



**The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington**  
Building bridges of understanding



**Can Kuwait Get Its Oil Strategy Back on Track?**

## Can Kuwait get its oil strategy back on track?

**WASHINGTON:** The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, in partnership with Reconnaissance Research, has published a groundbreaking study titled "Can Kuwait Get Its Oil Strategy Back on Track?" This collaborative research offers a comprehensive review of the obstacles and opportunities that lie ahead for Kuwait's oil sector amidst the global surge in oil demand due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

According to the report, despite oil being the lifeline of the Kuwaiti economy, Kuwait has struggled to take advantage of the heightened oil demand. Notably, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) failed to meet its oil exploration and production capacity targets. Additionally, the Al-Zour refinery project has encountered significant delays, leading to billions of dollars in unrealized revenue. This, coupled with an accel-

erating global shift away from fossil fuels, raises concerns about the potential for untapped hydrocarbon resources remaining unused.

The study also found an apparent reluctance among Kuwaiti officials to transparently discuss or address the reasons behind the KPC's missed targets. A series of potential factors — including opaque goal setting, inconsistent implementation mechanisms, and inadequate financing and staffing — have been identified as possible contributors to this slowdown in oil production.

Getting Kuwait's oil strategy back on track will necessitate a focused effort. As suggested by the research, a pivot towards increased transparency, robust analysis of past deficiencies, and development of viable solutions to overcome previous and emerging challenges, will be crucial.

This analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of Kuwait's oil strategy and offers insight into potential paths forward. For further information, please refer to the full report available on the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington's website.

quarter," High Frequency Economics' chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

The fuel for the positive PPI reading in June came from final demand services, which registered an increase of 0.2 percent due largely to a rise in the price of trade services demand, and other final demand services excluding transportation and warehousing.

Prices for final demand goods in June were unchanged following a 1.6 percent contraction in May. The Federal Reserve is weighing the prospect of a further interest rate hike this month to bring down consumer inflation, which is falling but remains stuck above policymakers' long-term target of two percent.

Against this backdrop, analysts broadly predict that the central bank will push forward with another quarter percentage point hike after their July 25-26 meeting. The latest inflation data are not likely to change the outcome of the upcoming Fed meeting, Farooqi said. "The subsequent rate path is less certain and will depend on incoming data," she added. — AFP

## US wholesale prices return to growth in June

**WASHINGTON:** US wholesale prices increased modestly in June, according to data released Thursday by the Labor Department, due in large part to an increase in the cost of services. The return to positive inflation after a contraction in May suggests wholesale prices remain buoyant in some areas.

The producer price index (PPI) ticked up by 0.1 percent last month, after the earlier contraction.

This was slightly below the median expectation of economists in a survey by MarketWatch, of a 0.2 percent rise. "In short, PPI inflation surprised to the downside and decelerated further to end the second



## Business

# Germany unveils strategy to deal with more 'assertive' China: Scholz

## New blueprint overhauls Berlin's stance toward Beijing

BERLIN: Germany on Thursday adopted a tougher strategy toward a more "assertive" China, its top trade partner, in a move Beijing warned could "damage cooperation and mutual trust". Seeking a balance between competing interests of the EU's biggest economy, the document overhauls Germany's stance toward China as a "partner, competitor and systemic rival".

"We want to reduce critical dependencies in future," Chancellor Olaf Scholz tweeted, saying Berlin had "reacted to a China that has changed and become more assertive". The 64-page blueprint, which the government said was embedded in the European Union's approach to China, showed the government was "realistic but not naive", Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said.

The document is the product of months of wrangling within the German government over its strategy toward China.

While Baerbock of the Greens has pushed for a more hawkish line and a greater emphasis on human rights, Scholz, a Social Democrat, has backed a more trade-friendly stance he calls "de-risking but not decoupling". The new China policy marks a finely calibrated balance of the two within the ruling coalition, the product of what Baerbock called "finding compromises... the lifeblood of democracies".

However it drew a strong reaction from Beijing, which said "viewing China as an 'systemic competitor and rival' is not in line with the objective facts, nor with the common interests of the two countries". A statement from the embassy in Berlin cautioned that "an ideological view of China... will only intensify misunderstandings and misjudgments, and damage cooperation and mutual trust".

The German paper noted that "whereas China's dependencies on Europe are constantly declining, Germany's dependencies on China have taken on greater significance in recent years". The govern-

ment said it did not intend "to impede China's economic progress and development".

"At the same time, de-risking is urgently needed," it said. Berlin "is observing with concern how China is endeavoring to influence the international order in line with the interests of its single-party system and thus to relativize the foundations of the rules-based international order, such as the status of human rights". However Germany also highlighted potential for greater cooperation, noting for example that "it will not be possible to overcome the climate crisis without China".

### 'Biggest threat'

Burned by its reliance on Russian gas and hurt by supply chain disruptions during the pandemic, Germany has been intensifying efforts to diversify away from China. In its first national security strategy unveiled last month, Berlin accused China of acting against German interests, putting international security "under increasing pressure" and disregarding human rights.

A report by Germany's intelligence agency also cited China as the "biggest threat in relation to economic and scientific espionage and foreign direct investments in Germany".

The harder line has alarmed Beijing, but also sparked fears in German industry which has grown increasingly dependent on China. Corporate giants such as Volkswagen and Siemens have in recent months outlined growth strategies that rely heavily on the Chinese market.

Scholz has stressed that Berlin wants to diversify trading partners, saying that Germany is "committed to actively broadening our economic relations with Asia and beyond".

Baerbock stressed Thursday that big companies would need to assume more responsibility for "de-risking" and not assume Berlin would provide a bailout if it came to an event such as a Chinese inva-



BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz presents German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser with flowers for her birthday at the weekly meeting of the German cabinet at the Chancellery in Berlin on July 13, 2023. — AFP

sion of Taiwan. The Federation of German Industries welcomed the strategy but warned that implementation would be key given the "danger" that companies' activities in China could be "too restricted and thus the generation of prosperity and innovation could be unnecessarily hindered".

Since the United States toughened up its economic policies against China, Beijing has feared its biggest partner in the EU could be

headed in the same direction.

Li Qiang, visiting Germany last month on his first trip abroad since he was named China's prime minister, warned Berlin against "using de-risking in name to carry out decoupling". The visit came in for strong criticism after Scholz acquiesced to a Chinese request not to allow journalist questions at a joint press conference — widely seen in Berlin as a willingness to cede values in return for access. — AFP



## Jazeera Airways launches direct flight to Islamabad

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low cost airline has now started direct flights to Islamabad. By adding Pakistan's capital city to its growing list of destinations, Jazeera now flies to three cities in the country, including Karachi and Lahore. One way fares to Islamabad will be KD 49 while a return ticket will be priced at KD 99.

Islamabad, also known as the 'Green City' is the capital of Pakistan. A well-planned, structured and cosmopolitan city, it is also the cleanest and greenest, filled with interesting tourist attractions. This includes the Faisal Mosque, South Asia's largest mosque, Daman-i-Koh, Margalla Zoo, Pakistan Monument, Shakarparian, Lok Virsa Museum and the Rawal lake view point. The popular hill station Murree is a short drive away from Islamabad as are Abbottabad and Bhurban.

There are close to 130,000 Pakistani nationals living in Kuwait. By connecting directly to Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, Jazeera Airways offers these expats convenient and affordable flights to visit their home country.

Rohit Ramchandran, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways said "Islamabad is the third city in Pakistan that Jazeera Airways connects with direct flights. While staying focused on growing our network, we continue to offer more cost effective options for both tourists and expats from Kuwait to reach different cities. By making travel more accessible, we hope to encourage tourism to Pakistan while also giving Pakistani nationals the opportunity to visit their home country more often."

Jazeera Airways operates a network of 64 cities across the Middle East, Europe, Central and North Asia as well as Africa. To book your next flight to any of these destinations, you can visit the airline's website (www.jazeeraairways.com), or the Jazeera app.

## Dutch finmin quits after 'hate and threats'

THE HAGUE: Dutch Finance Minister Sigrid Kaag said Thursday she was quitting politics, blaming the impact of "hate, intimidation and threats" on her family. Kaag's centre-left D66 party was vehemently opposed to plans by Prime Minister Mark Rutte to tighten rules for asylum seekers, which led to the fall of the coalition government last week. "For me, in addition to love and appreciation, the past period was also accompanied by hate, intimidation and threats," said Kaag, 61, as she revealed she would not lead D66 in elections expected this autumn. "That put a heavy burden on my family," the former UN diplomat said in a statement, published on D66's website. Dutch media reports said Kaag, who was also deputy prime minister, was under constant protection by security services. — AFP

## Huawei Watch 4 delivers smart experience

KUWAIT: Huawei is always ahead of the game when it comes to wearables. This is especially true for their smartwatches. This brand has a knack for delivering premium smartwatches that carry the elegance of traditional luxury watches fused with cutting-edge smart features. Their latest lineup of smartwatches, the Huawei Watch 4 Series, is no exception. It is a mesmerizing blend of craftsmanship and technology that effortlessly scoops up the title for the best smartwatch of 2023. This new smartwatch is a full-fledged health and wellness companion and a fashionable accessory, and comes packed with amazing smart features.

The Huawei Watch 4 Series will be available in Kuwait on the 18th of July, 2023 from Huawei's official website and select retailers.

### Out of the world design

At the heart of the Huawei Watch 4 Series lies the exquisite design philosophy. The minute you lay your eyes on it, you'll notice the futuristic elegance underpinned by an aesthetic inspired by the vast and infinite universe. The Huawei Watch 4 Pro, with its aerospace-grade titanium case, exudes a premium feel, its robustness balanced by a sophisticated sheen that is bound

to turn heads. Not to be outdone, the Huawei Watch 4 features a sleek Black Stainless-Steel Case complemented by 3D curved glass that crafts a polished and contemporary look.

Even the watch faces stay true to this celestial theme, with designs inspired by the moon and six different planets. The Spherical Sapphire Glass covering the dial is highly resistant to scratches, ensuring that the watch remains as stylish and elegant as ever, even in the face of regular.

### Health management made easy

One of the key reasons to get a smartwatch is to keep track of health and fitness. And Huawei's new generation of smartwatches makes a huge leap in health monitoring. The Huawei Watch 4 Series comes with the Health Glance feature gives you a comprehensive but easy-to-understand report of your health status. It uses quick multiple health indicators to measure various health data items at the same time. These include ECG, heart rate, SpO2, Arterial stiffness detection, stress levels, skin temperature and Respiratory Check. Just a tap on your wrist to get comprehensive health data — it's as simple as that.

The Huawei Watch 4 Series is also the first of the Huawei smartwatches to



support the Health Trend feature. With this feature, you can keep track of your health like never before. It lets you see how your sleep, stress, heart rate and blood oxygen change over time. It's a great way to learn more about yourself and live a healthier life.

### Stay connected everywhere

The Huawei Watch 4 Series comes with an upgraded version of the eSIM. With this, you can make and receive calls and send messages right from your wrist, even if your phone isn't around. This is perfect for those moments when carrying a phone might be cumbersome, like during a workout. Or whenever you decide to go light. Besides cellular calling and messaging, the watch also supports standalone navigation using Petal Maps. Now you have the

freedom to explore everywhere with confidence.

### Power packed

Battery life is a key element that defines a great smartwatch. And thanks to its Dual-core architecture 2.0, the Huawei Watch 4 Series offers incredible battery life. In the Standard Mode, the Huawei Watch 4 Pro offers an impressive 4.5 days of battery life, while the Watch 4 provides a still substantial 3 days. But in the Ultra-long Battery Life Mode, the battery life is even better, with the Watch 4 Pro giving you up to 21 days and the Watch 4 lasting up to 14 days on a single charge. Moreover, a short 15-minute charge provides a full day of battery life. That means you can focus more on your training sessions and adventures and less on the battery status.

## In Canada, deserted oil wells are time bombs

RED DEER, Canada: With its flaking red paint, broken pressure gauge and cranks fallen to the ground, an oil well sits forsaken in western Canada, like tens of thousands of others that have been out of service for decades — but never plugged.

Activists and experts say the existence of these inactive oil and gas installations — often dug hundreds of meters (yards) below the surface in Alberta province — is a ticking ecological time bomb for the vast country.

"Every single one of them is simply steel and concrete. They erode and break down," said Regan Boychuk, the founder of Reclaim Alberta, a group advocating for the clean-up of such wells.

"Every one of these holes needs to be managed, monitored for eternity because of the danger of leaks," he told AFP. Each one of these wells also emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas that, over a 20-year period, is "86 times more impactful compared to a molecule of carbon dioxide," stresses McGill University professor Mary Kang, who has written a study on the issue. It's a source of pollution that she believes is likely underestimated and "has a much bigger uncertainty range compared to other methane emission sources," Kang notes.

More than 120,000 oil and gas wells are inactive but not sealed off in Alberta and Saskatchewan provinces, home to more than 90 percent of Canada's wells, according to government data released in 2022. The oldest of these has not been used since World War I.

Overall, according to that government data, these installations have emitted an average of 16,000 tons of methane per year over a century — the equivalent of 545,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually, or what about 237,000 vehicles emit in one year.

### Work postponed indefinitely

Most of the wells were built sometime between the dawn of the oil and gas era in the 1860s and the end of



RED DEER: Activists and experts say the existence of inactive oil and gas installations - often dug hundreds of meters (yards) below the surface in Alberta province - is a ticking ecological time bomb for the vast country.

the 1940s. In some provinces of Canada, which has the world's fourth largest proven oil reserves, they are not even registered. After decades of industrial expansion, Alberta — home to most of the country's oil resources, mainly in the form of oil sands — saw the number of inactive wells increase rapidly since 2010, particularly after crude prices dropped off in 2014.

Under the polluter-pay principle enshrined in Canadian law, energy companies must pay for the plugging of wells and cleanup of the surrounding area, but there is thus far no deadline for that work to be completed. This allows oil and gas firms to postpone the work indefinitely, or to transfer their inactive wells to smaller companies. When these companies file for bankruptcy, the environmental burden for orphaned wells falls to provincial authorities — and creates another bureaucratic nightmare.

Over roughly a decade, the number of orphaned wells in Alberta exploded, from 700 in 2010 to almost 10,000 in 2023. The government in Ottawa says the cost of cleaning them up will soar from CAN \$361 million (\$272 million) in 2020 to \$1.1 billion in 2025.

While the Orphan Well Association in Alberta plans to get the job done over the next 10 to 12 years, some

say the monumental task has been wildly misjudged. "There are tens of thousands that fit the common sense definition, but only a few thousand are officially designated," Boychuk says.

### Polluted soil

Albert Hummel, a farmer in southern Alberta, had seven abandoned wells on his land. But he's one of the lucky ones — some of them were finally sealed off and "reclaimed," or restored to their original state. There are two left to handle. "It's a slow process, it takes time," says Hummel, who lost the royalties he was earning for the use of his land once the oil company in question went out of business in 2019.

Once the soil is contaminated, it takes decades for the pollutants to evaporate. Only then can cleanup work begin. After the ground is purified, the wells must be plugged with cement, each layer of soil carefully replaced, and the area leveled off with the surrounding fields for it to be considered "reclaimed." Right in the middle of one of Hummel's fields, the remains of a well have prevented the farmer from using part of that land — "it's just straight loss of production," he says, pointing to the pipes emerging from the earth. — AFP





# Iraq's marshes are dying, and a civilization with them

An aerial picture shows the drying-up marshes of Chibayish in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.

**M**ohammed Hamid Nour is only 23, but he is already nostalgic for how Iraq's Mesopotamian marshes once were before drought dried them up, decimating his herd of water buffaloes. Even at their centre in Chibayish, only a few expanses of the ancient waterways — home to a Marsh Arab culture that goes back millennia — survive, linked by channels that snake through the reeds. Pull back further and the water gives way to a parched landscape of bald and cracked earth.

Both the Mesopotamian marshes, and the culture of the Marsh Arabs — or Ma'adan — like Mohammed who live in them, have UNESCO world heritage status. The Ma'adan have hunted and fished there for 5,000 years, building houses from woven reeds on floating reed islands where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers come together before pouring into the Gulf. Even their beautifully intricate mosques were made of reeds.

But the marshlands have shrunk from 20,000 square

kilometers (7,700 square miles) in the early 1990s to 4,000 (1,500 square miles) by latest estimates — choked by dams on the great rivers upstream in Turkey and Syria and the soaring temperatures of climate change. Only a few thousand of the quarter million Ma'adan who lived in the marshes in the early 1990s remain. Experts say that Iraq's management of the waters has not helped.

## Saddam's bid to kill them

The marshes already almost died once when former dictator Saddam Hussein dried them out so he could hunt down the Shiite rebels who had taken refuge there after the failed uprising in the wake of the First Gulf War in 1991. In a few months, Saddam turned 90 percent of the marshes into a "desert", Assadi recalled. Most of the Ma'adan fled or "moved elsewhere in Iraq or emigrated to Sweden or the United States".

But when Saddam was toppled by the American-led invasion in 2003 the ditches he dug to drain the marshes were destroyed, and both the marshes and the Ma'adan returned. Two decades later, the water level is plummeting again. "The level of the Euphrates in Iraq is around half of what it was in the 1970s," said Ali Al-Quraishi, of Baghdad's University of Technology.

Dams upstream in Turkey, where the Tigris and the Euphrates have their sources, and others on their tributaries in Syria and Iran, are the "principle" cause, he said. "The Turks have built more dams to meet the needs of agriculture there. As the population rises, more water is needed for irrigation and domestic use," the expert added. Water has always sparked tensions between Iraq and Turkey. With Iraq asking Ankara to release more, the Turkish ambassador to Baghdad, Ali Riza Guney, sparked outrage last July by accusing the Iraqis of "wasting water". There is a grain of truth in the Turkish claim, scientists say. Iraq's water management is far from ideal.

Since the time of the ancient Sumerians, Iraqi farmers have flooded their land to irrigate it, which is considered hugely wasteful. But now water for agriculture is short, with the authorities drastically reducing arable farming to make sure there is enough drinking water for the country's 42 million people. Iraq's President Abdul Latif Rashid told the BBC last month that the government "has taken significant steps to improve the water management system in talks with neighboring countries", without going into detail.

## Pollution and heavy metals

Meanwhile in the central marshes, there is so little water even canoes get stuck. Where

there was water "two months ago" is now a desert, said herder Youssef Mutlaq. Not long ago a dozen or so "mudhifs" — traditional reed houses — were still occupied. "There were lots of buffaloes, but when the water started to disappear, people left," said the 20-year-old as his animals chewed feed from a bag with less and less grass to be found. Pollution is also rising alongside salination. Sewers, pesticides and waste from factories and hospitals are dumped directly into the Euphrates along its course, and much of it ends up in the marshes, said Nadheer Fazaa, of Baghdad University, and a specialist on climate change.

## 'Our life is there'

The French NGO Agronomists and Vets Without Borders (AVSF), supported by France, is training their Iraqi colleagues and trying to help herders and fishermen. "We spent last summer distributing drinking water for both the people and the animals of the wetlands," said vet Herve Petit, an expert in rural development.

Many herders have been forced to "sell off their animals at derisory prices", he added. But such initiatives are rare. Engineer Jassim Al-Assadi is one of the few battling for the marshes and alerting the authorities. Khaled Shemal, of the water resources ministry, said they were "working hard" to restore the wetlands. But



An Iraqi man looks at a grounded boat along a dried-up bank in the Chibayish marshes in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province. - AFP photos

Mohammed has lost three-quarters of his herd to the drought that is now ravaging the marshes for a fourth-consecutive year. It is the worst in 40 years, the United Nations said this week, describing the situation as "alarming", with "70 percent of the marshes devoid of water".

"I beg you Allah, have mercy!" Mohammed implored, keffiyah on his head as he contemplated the disaster under the unforbearing blue of a cloudless sky. The buffaloes of the marshes produce the milk for the thick clotted "geymar" cream Iraqis love to have with honey for breakfast.

As the marshes dry out, the water gets salty until it starts killing the buffaloes. Many of Mohammed's herd died like this, others he was forced to sell before they too perished. "If the drought continues and the government doesn't help us, the others will also die," said the young herder, who has no other income.



A woman bakes bread in a traditional outdoor mud oven in the Chibayish marshes in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.

Water levels in the central marshlands and the Euphrates which feeds it are "dropping by half a centimeter a day", said engineer Jassim Al-Assadi, of Nature Iraq, the country's leading conservation group. That will get worse "over the next two months as the temperatures rise and more and more water evaporates," he added.

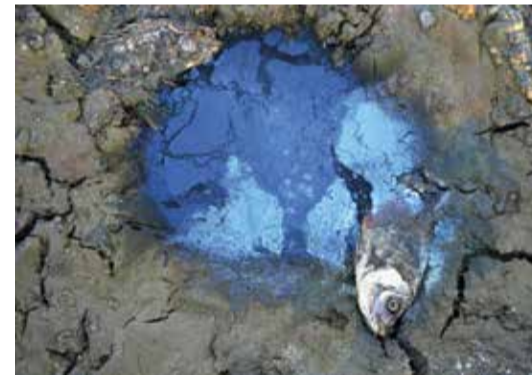
## 50 degrees C

AFP crisscrossed the central Chibayish marshes at the end of June, where at dawn it was already 35 degrees Centigrade (95 degrees Fahrenheit) before temperatures shot towards 50. Iraq is one of the five countries most touched by some effects of climate change, according to the United Nations. Rainfall is rarer and rarer, and in the next 25 years the World Bank said the temperature will go up by an average of 2.5 degrees.

To draw water for his remaining buffaloes, Mohammed Hamid Nour takes his canoe out into deeper water, where salt levels are lower. He rolled up his sleeves to fill a water tank on the canoe revealing a tattoo of the Zulfikar, the sword of Imam Ali, one of the founding figures of



A local youth lifts a dried-up skull of a water buffalo in a parched area of the Chibayish marshes in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.



A dead fish lies on the cracking earth of a dry marsh in Chibayish in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.



A veterinarian inspects a water buffalo with high fever at a barn in the Chibayish marshland area in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.



A buffalo farmer picks reeds to feed his herd in the Chibayish marshland in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.

"We have analyzed the water and found numerous pollutants like heavy metals" which cause illness, the scientist said. And all the while, the fish are dying. Where once the binni — the king of the Iraqi table — swam, there are now only fish unfit for consumption. While the causes of the disaster are not being tackled, some are trying to limit the consequences of the drought.

drinking water and supplies for homes and agriculture came first.

In the meantime, many Marsh Arabs have left for the towns and cities, where they are often treated as pariahs. Last year, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) called it an "exodus". Walid Khdeir left the wetlands with his wife and six children "four or five months ago" to live in a house on dry land in the city of Chibayish.

"It was difficult, our lives were there like our grandparents' before us. But what can we do?" the 30-year-old said. Today, he is fattening buffaloes to resell but is obliged to buy fodder at exorbitant prices because there is hardly a blade of grass for them to eat. "If the water comes back like before, we will return to the marshes. Our life is there," he said. — AFP



Buffaloes wade into muddy waters in the Chibayish marshes in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province.



## Lifestyle

## In Brazil, stargazers escape cities in search of 'astro-tourism'

Awestruck by the oranges and blues of the Jewel Box star cluster, part of the Southern Cross constellation, Pedro Froes manages to get out a few words: "It's incredible." Froes is viewing the stars from a telescope in Desengano State Park, a rural patch of Brazil largely spared from light pollution, located some 260 kilometers (160 miles) north of Rio de Janeiro. Desengano is Latin America's first "International Dark Sky Park," as designated by the global light pollution tracker DarkSky. And Froes is one of the park's growing number of "astro-tourists," drawn there by its isolation from cities and the light they spew into the night sky.

"From here you can see 3,000 stars a year with the naked eye, without the help of an instrument," says astronomer Daniel Mello, from the Valongo Observatory at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. "In cities like Rio or Sao Paulo, at most, you can see 200 a year." In the front garden of the park's headquarters, located in the small town of Santa Maria Madalena, Mello conducts a public observation session in front of about 20 people, pointing with a laser to the Southern Cross, Scorpio and Centaurus constellations.

The evening is part of a project created by Mello and a group of specialists in tourism, ecology and photography. The nearest big city is 120 kilometers away, protecting the park — replete



Daniel Mello shows with a laser light the Milky Way to a group of visitors at the Desengano State Natural Park during a stargazing meeting at the Desengano State Natural Park in Santa Maria Madalena, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil. — AFP photos

with vegetation, forest and mountains — from artificial light. That means the Milky Way is visible to the naked eye even on moonlit nights. Two telescopes provide views of more distant stars. "I always liked to admire the sky, but I rarely had the opportunity to see it like here," says Froes, a 22-year-old biologist from Niteroi, a city near Rio.

#### Annual star festival

Some 80 percent of people on Earth sleep under night skies polluted by artificial light, the consequence of modernization and urbanization. But beyond clouding out the stars, light pollution also has negative environmental effects

— leading to restless humans and disoriented migratory birds, and causing reproductive issues for other species. In Latin America, the only other area recognized by DarkSky is in Chile's Elqui Valley, classified as a "sanctuary."

Unlike in Chile, Europe or the United States, astro-tourism is still in its infancy in Brazil. But more and more stargazers have been trekking to Santa Maria Madalena, "especially in the last six months," says Nelson Saraiva. He runs one of the few hotels in the town of 10,000, where most people are farmers.

Saraiva, a retired teacher, is convinced astro-tourism can become a huge economic boon for the community.



Green laser lights are seen in the sky as Daniel Mello uses it to show constellations during a stargazing meeting at the Desengano State Natural Park in Santa Maria Madalena, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil.

Beyond Mello's observation sessions, there are also monthly gatherings that mix astronomy and gastronomy. The government and local entrepreneurs have banded together to organize a star festival to take advantage of growing tourist interest. The first festival was organized last September, with plans in place this fall for what's shaping up to be an annual tradition.

#### Ecological equilibrium

To obtain certification from DarkSky, Desengano park also had to commit to promoting environmental education, as well as using low-impact lighting. Those sorts of moves are good for the sky, but

also have down-to-Earth implications felt closer to home.

"We have an enormous diversity of birds, mammals, and reptiles which are here only because the place is preserved," says park research manager and biologist Carlota Enrici. "Reducing light pollution keeps the ecosystem in balance." Mello, the astronomer, hopes other places in Brazil can follow Desengano's model, which would not only expand tourism but also "rescue people's contact with the starry sky and with nature." — AFP

## TO TRACK HUMAN IMPACT ON EARTH, SCIENTISTS PROBE CRAWFORD LAKE



Birds swim on the Tiete river covered with toxic foam in Salto, 100km from Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

## Toxic foam blights river crucial to Brazil's biggest city

Not far from Latin America's biggest city, Sao Paulo, a river is covered in a white layer that resembles fresh snow but is in fact a smelly, toxic foam. The Tiete river, some 1,100 kilometers long, is crucial for potable water, irrigation and energy production in southeast Brazil, the country's most populated area. But parts of the waterway, including one area just 100 kilometers (62 miles) from the metropolis, have been befouled by phosphate and phosphorus residues from household detergents used by Sao Paulo's 22 million inhabitants and washed down the sewers.

A tributary of the Parana river, the waterway has been covered in a visible foam layer since last week, at one point spread over more than 10 kilometers and also spotted blighting several waterfalls. "When these residues enter the fast-running waters of the Tiete, it is as if a washing machine has been turned on," said Malu Ribeiro of the NGO SOS Mata Atlantica, describing the foamy mess.

The NGO warns that fumes from the foam can cause sore throats and breathing problems, and contact could irritate the skin. The impact on animal and plant life was likely similar to that caused by "acid rain," said Ribeiro. The phenomenon is not a new one: The foam is a frequent feature of the river in the dry winter months when there is less water to dissolve the chemicals.

In the 1990s, the situation was sometimes so bad that the foam ran down the streets of some cities near the river's shore. Improvements to water treatment have alleviated the problem, but some years are still worse than others. Ribeiro said the foam is worse in periods with big temperature fluctuations. In winter the contrast can be quite extreme, with very cold mornings and very hot afternoons.

"Cold water is heavier, and it carries polluting residues to the bottom... But when it is heated by the sun, these residues rise to the surface and form a thicker foam," she explained. SOS Mata Atlantica is advocating for a ban on phosphate and phosphorus in domestic cleaning products. Water treatment must be improved too: In the Alto Tiete basin that serves Sao Paulo, just over half of wastewater is treated, according to official data from 2021. Sao Paulo's environment secretariat has promised to invest 5.6 billion reais (about \$1.1 billion) in the water treatment network by 2026. — AFP

On first glance, it looks like just another small lake in Canada, one of thousands across the vast country. But the view under the surface of Crawford Lake outside Toronto tells a very different story. Scientists believe the lake's exceptionally well-preserved sediment layers serve as a reference point for a proposed new geological chapter in the planet's history, defined by the considerable changes wrought by human activity: the Anthropocene. For years, geologists have tried to find the Anthropocene's so-called "golden spike" — the spot on Earth with the best evidence of this global transformation.

And Crawford Lake — located in Ontario province, in the greater Toronto area, is that place, according to the International Commission on Stratigraphy's Anthropocene Working Group, which revealed its decision on Tuesday. Local legend has it that the lake is bottomless. But in fact, it's the exact opposite — its depths hold unparalleled riches, a phenomenon that put the lake on the short list to be the "spike" years ago.

The pristinely preserved sediments show better than anywhere else on Earth that humans have irrevocably changed the planet at all levels, including its physical composition. "It's very deep, but it's not very large. So that means that the waters don't mix all the way to the bottom," explains Francine McCarthy, a professor at Brock University who has led the research into Crawford Lake. "And so the sediments that accumulate in the lake are not disturbed," she told AFP in April, when samples were taken for the ICS's Anthropocene working group.



The distinct years of sediment deposits are visible in this section of sediment collected from the bottom of Crawford Lake by a team of scientists from Carleton and Brock Universities.



An aerial view of Crawford Lake as a team consisting of scientists from Carleton University and Brock University gather sediment layer samples from the lake bottom at the Crawford Lake Conservation Area.



An aerial view of Crawford Lake as a team consisting of scientists from Carleton University and Brock University gather sediment layer samples from the lake bottom at the Crawford Lake Conservation Area near Milton, Ontario, Canada. — AFP photos

#### 'Distinct fingerprint'

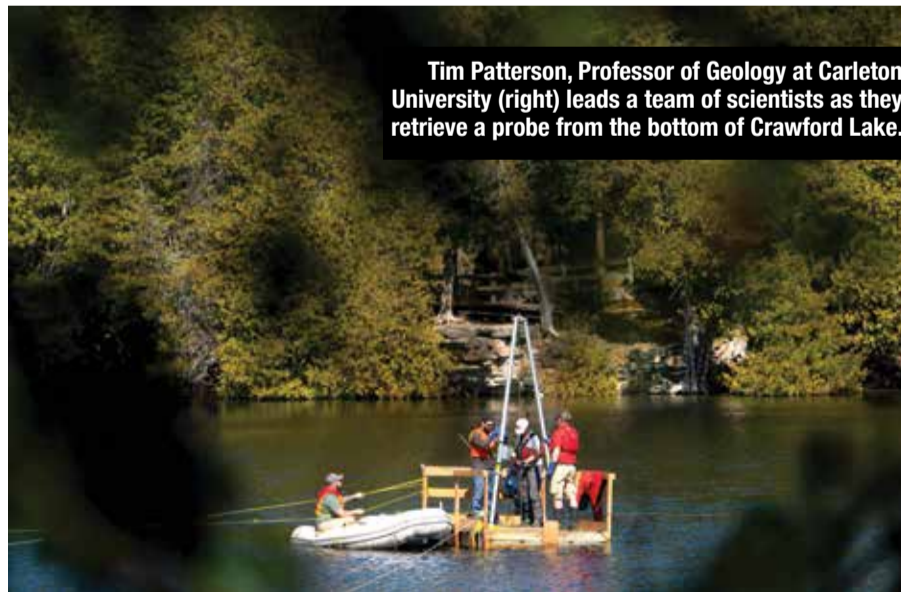
For centuries, Crawford Lake has been slowly absorbing signs of change. Everything that once floated on the water's surface is now embedded in some form in its sediments. The first humans to leave their mark on the lake were Iroquois villagers who built homes along its shores. The sediments then showed the mounting influence of European settlers on the landscape, as trees vanished and new species emerged. Then in the 20th century, fly ash from the use of coal and other fossil fuels settled in the lake, as cities developed and become more industrialized. Heavy metals such as copper and lead also appear progressively in the layers. "We can see local disturbance. Or we can look at regional

effects (like) pollution, said Paul Hamilton, a researcher at the Canadian Museum of Nature.

The lake's sediments can also document global change, he said, such as atmospheric deposition of chemicals. For McCarthy, the other sites in contention to be the Anthropocene's "golden spike" did not have "such a distinct fingerprint of exactly what the core looks like and what each year looks like." "Each year has its own personality, like people," she said.

#### 'Everything changed'

Extracting samples from Crawford Lake that can serve as markers for a new geological period requires skill, precision and speed. Tim Patterson,



Tim Patterson, Professor of Geology at Carleton University (right) leads a team of scientists as they retrieve a probe from the bottom of Crawford Lake.



A team of scientists from Carleton University and Brock University remove frozen sections of sediment layers after they were gathered from the lake bottom at Crawford Lake Conservation Area.



Tim Patterson (center), Professor of Geology at Carleton University, left, leads a team of scientists as they retrieve a probe from the bottom of Crawford Lake while gathering sediment layer samples at Crawford Lake.

a researcher at Carleton University in Canada, and his team are specialists. To recover the sediments from the depths of Crawford Lake without damaging them, they fill huge metal tubes with dry ice and alcohol.

The tubes — about two meters (6.5 feet) long and 15 centimeters wide — are then plunged into the lake's bed for 30 minutes, so that the sediments can freeze onto them, forming a series of distinct lines for each year, like the rings of a tree.

In April, what interested Patterson the most was traces of plutonium. The start of the Anthropocene has been set in 1950 "to pick up something that was utterly unique in the history of the world. It was this nuclear testing in the air," he explained.

"Humans had never done that before. And that leaves a record, not just regionally but all around the world." McCarthy, who has been working at Crawford Lake for nearly four decades, says 1950 also marks when humankind entered into a seemingly endless cycle of consumption, production and pollution. "So for 12,000 years, it was happening the same way. And then suddenly, very suddenly, within a few years, everything changed," she told AFP. But McCarthy nevertheless remains hopeful for the future. "If geologists, who after all are the people who found the plutonium in the rocks and the petroleum in the rocks, if they accept that there is a fundamental change that's due to humans, then maybe action will be taken," she said. — AFP



The distinct years of sediment deposits are visible in this section of sediment collected from the bottom of Crawford Lake by a team of scientists from Carleton and Brock Universities.



## Lifestyle

## Hot Tour Summer sees Taylor, Beyonce eye \$1 billion mark

It's a pop queen's world and we're just living in it: Industry watchers are speculating over whether Tay or Bey could post the first billion-dollar tour, as 2023 witnesses an explosion of shows. Taylor Swift and Beyonce are among the dozens of stars who've hit the road and fueled a booming arena market, as demand for live entertainment soars after years of pandemic-induced cancellations and postponements.

poned it due to illness. The 64-year-old is slated to start her European leg of shows in October, and reschedule the North American concerts for later dates. So it's the 33-year-old Swift who is now within striking distance of the billion-dollar mark, with 106 current dates on her "Eras" tour.

Odds are also favoring Beyonce as she commences the North American leg of her "Renaissance" tour. If either

Bey and Tay are averaging out to be more than double that, for basic seats.

Live Nation, which in 2010 merged with Ticketmaster, says it's already sold 100 million tickets for 2023 concerts—more than it sold for the entire year of 2019. The company posted \$4.4 billion in revenue during this year's second quarter, promoting some 12,500 concerts to 33.5 million fans. "With most of the world fully re-opened, it's clear

tics and ardent calls for the company to be broken up.

That possibility doesn't appear on the horizon, and ticket prices keep climbing in the meantime—and fans keep paying. "The vertical integrated monopoly really has a lot of ripple effects in terms of prices," said Andrew Leff, a music industry veteran and attorney who teaches at the University of Southern California.

"If you're Ticketmaster and you can charge anything you want and you don't have any competition, and a demand for Taylor Swift or Beyonce comes along, that's simple supply-and-demand economics," he told AFP. "They can charge whatever they want—which is what they do."

**'Beyonce blip'**

And according to Leff, the concert boom isn't necessarily seeing its benefits trickle down to smaller acts. "There's really two music industries," he said. "There's the music industry for the one percent and the music industry for the 99 percent."

"Unless you're playing in front of 500 people or more every night, you're probably not even breaking even." It's an all too familiar story: Touring doesn't come cheap, and it's a lifeline for artists whose royalties from streaming notoriously make the tiniest of dents. But with everyone back on the road trying to make up lost revenue from the pandemic years, there's competition for everything from venues to tour buses.

Last fall, the indie artist Santigold was among the first to speak out on the challenges facing performers like her—and canceled her tour, saying she was "simply unable to make it work," not least due to inflation and competition in



Fans of US musician Beyonce queue to enter to the Friends Arena to watch her first concert of the World Tour named "Renaissance", in Solna, north of Stockholm.



US singer-songwriter Beyonce arrives for the world premiere of Disney's "The Lion King" at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift performs onstage on the first night of her "Eras Tour" at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.



British singer Elton John performs on the Pyramid Stage on day 5 of the Glastonbury festival in the village of Pilton in Somerset, southwest England.

From Pink to Coldplay, Bruce Springsteen to Drake, and SZA to The Weeknd, stadiums across the United States and beyond are setting the stage for what's poised to be the biggest year for live music on record. "I have never seen as many artists out at the same time, in the same space," Stacy Merida, a professor at American University who studies the business of music, told AFP.

Madonna—who in the early 1990s created the contemporary tour as we know it, with elaborate sets and costumes—was set to embark on a career-spanning tour in mid-July, but post-

cross the history-making line, they'd jump past Elton John. His just-ended "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour, which began in 2018, had grossed more than \$910 million as of June 18, a few weeks before his final show in Stockholm on July 8, according to Billboard Boxscore.

John had surpassed the previous record-holder, Ed Sheeran's 2017-2019 "Divide" tour, which nabbed \$776 million. Part of the current boom comes from increased ticket prices: Sheeran charged just under \$100 for "Divide," according to tracker Pollstar, but played well over 200 shows. Tickets for

that concerts remain a high priority for fans," Live Nation said in its most recent earnings report.

**Ticketing grumbles**

But while demand has soared, it's not without much grumbling over the privileged position of Live Nation and Ticketmaster. For years, concertgoers have complained of hidden fees, soaring costs, rampant scalpers and limited tickets due to presales. The issue reignited earlier this year after botched sales for Swift's tour wreaked havoc, prompting a congressional hearing over purported anti-competitive prac-



US percussionist Sheila E (third left) poses with family during her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star ceremony in Hollywood, California,

## Sheila E makes history with her Walk of Fame star

Sheila E made history on the Hollywood Walk of Fame Wednesday, becoming the first female solo percussionist honored on the fabled walk. After her star was revealed, she posed for photos, tapping drumsticks, and tossing one in the air as she so famously has done during her performances. The musician born Sheila Escovedo said she was an athlete as a girl and teen, running track and playing soccer.

She said her goal was to win a gold medal at the Olympics in track, but her goals shifted. "Being an athlete, and actually being a musician and an artist, it's like being an athlete—the things we have to do to be good at our craft," said Sheila E during the ceremony.

Ringo Starr was among those attending the ceremony which was emceed by Rock & Roll Hall of Famer and star recipient Jimmy Jam. Jimmy Jam, his songwriting and producing partner Terry Lewis, and Sheila E received Emmy nominations for outstanding music direction in 2020 as music directors of "Let's Go Crazy: The Grammy Salute To Prince."

"I'm proud to call Sheila E a friend and to be here to say a few words about this incredible woman," Starr said. "Sheila E is also a force of nature." Grammy and Oscar-winning R&B singer H.E.R. also paid tribute during the ceremony, saying she would listen to Sheila E when she was a kid. She said when she was 13, she saw Sheila E perform with Prince.



US percussionist Sheila E (right) gestures next to US music producer Jimmy Jam during her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star ceremony in Hollywood, California

"And that was the moment that changed my life forever, because at that moment I knew, like, I could do it," she said. "I'm looking at this amazing woman, musician, multi-instrumentalist on stage with another musician that I love, and I was so inspired." At the end of the ceremony, Sheila E performed a song on drums with her father, Pete Escovedo, who received a Latin Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021 along with his daughter.

Born Dec 12, 1957, in Oakland, Sheila E's early musical influences included her uncle Coke Escovedo, a percussionist with the rock band Santana and Latin rock band Azteca; an-

other uncle, Mario Escovedo, was the front man for the rock band The Dragons, the rock bands Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead, the R&B/pop group the Pointer Sisters and the funk band Sly & the Family Stone.

"I used to sit on the corner outside of the local community center with Twinkies and 7-Up listening to Sly and Larry Graham rehearse," she said. Sheila E made her recording debut with jazz bassist Alphonso Johnson on "Yesterday's Dream" in 1976. By her early 20s, she had already played with George Duke, Lionel Richie, Marvin Gaye, Herbie Hancock and Diana Ross.

In 1977, she and her father released the album "Solo Two." That same year, she joined The George Duke Band. Following a Bay Area gig in the late 1970s, Sheila E met Prince backstage, which led to their "Purple Rain" recording sessions, including her vocals on the 1984 classic "Erotic City."

Sheila E also released her first album in 1984, "The Glamorous Life," which reached seventh on the Billboard R&B charts and was certified as a gold album by the recording industry trade group, the Recording Industry Association of America.

A single from the album, also titled "The Glamorous Life," reached first on the dance club songs chart. Sheila E received all four of her Grammy nominations in 1985, including for best new artist, losing to Cyndi Lauper.

Her other nominations were for best pop vocal performance, female, and best rhythm & blues song, both for "The Glamorous Life" single, and best R&B instrumental performance for "Short-berry Strawcake," the second track on "The Glamorous Life" album. Sheila E released her second album, "Romance 1600," in 1985, which was also certified gold, a feat none of her subsequent six albums accomplished.

Sheila E has also performed at the opening ceremony for the 1996 Summer Olympics, the Oscars and the Kennedy Center Honors. She received her first Emmy nomination in 2010 for outstanding music direction as music director of "In Performance at the White House: Fiesta Latina."

—www.cbsnews.com



Peter Michael Escovedo and Juan Escovedo play drums with US percussionist Sheila E (right) during her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star ceremony in Hollywood, California

## Hollywood set for first shutdown strike since 1960

Hollywood actors were poised to go on strike Thursday, joining writers in the first industry-wide shutdown in 63 years after last-ditch talks failed, with nearly all film and television production likely to grind to a halt. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), which represents 160,000 performers including A-list stars, said negotiations late Wednesday had ended without a deal on their demands over dwindling pay and the threat posed by artificial intelligence.

Its negotiators have unanimously recommended a strike to its national committee, who are expected to vote on Thursday morning. The vote opens the door to a "double strike" with writers, who have already spent 11 weeks on the picket line—which would trigger the first Hollywood shutdown since 1960.

Popular series set to return to television this year would face lengthy delays. And, if strikes continue, future blockbuster films would be postponed too. Actors, like writers, are demanding better pay, and protections against the future use of AI in television and films.

"As you know, over the past decade, your compensation has been severely eroded by the rise of the streaming ecosystem. Furthermore, artificial intelligence poses an existential threat to creative professions," a SAG-AFTRA statement said after the talks fell through.

Industry executives have "refused to acknowledge that enormous shifts in the industry and economy have had a detrimental impact on those who perform labor for the studios," it continued.

"We are deeply disappointed that SAG-AFTRA has decided to walk away from negotiations. This is the Union's choice, not ours," the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers said early Thursday. Hollywood studios had called in federal mediators to help resolve the deadlock—a move described by SAG-AFTRA as a "cynical ploy."

SAG-AFTRA represents A-list stars such as Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence and Glenn Close. All members have pre-approved industrial action if a deal was not struck. The last time the union went on strike, in 1980, it lasted more than three months.

**Premieres and parties**

A strike would immediately prevent stars from promoting some of the year's biggest releases, right at the peak of the movie industry's summer blockbuster season. In London, a premiere Wednesday night for Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" was brought forward by an hour, so that cast including Robert Downey Jr., Matt Damon and Emily Blunt could attend without breaking union rules, Variety reported.

But a strike would derail the much-hyped film's US premiere, due to take place in New York on Monday, as well as a red-carpet launch this weekend at Disneyland for the new "Haunted Mansion" movie.

And the annual Comic-Con pop culture gathering in San Diego next week could be stripped of its stars. Even the Emmy Awards, television's version of the Oscars, which is due to take place on September 18, is reportedly mulling a delay to November or even next year.

While the writers' strike has already dramatically reduced the number of movies and shows in production, an actors' walkout would shutter almost everything. Some reality TV, animation and talk shows could continue. On Wednesday, Hollywood unions representing directors, behind-the-scenes film workers and writers issued a statement of "unwavering support and solidarity" with the actors. "While the studios have collective worth of trillions of dollars, billions of viewers globally, and sky-high profits, this fight is not about actors against the studios," it said.

Workers "across all crafts and departments" stand together "to prevent mega-corporations from eroding the conditions we fought decades to achieve." Actors and writers are demanding higher pay to counteract inflation, and guarantees for their future livelihoods. In addition to salaries when they are actively working, actors earn payments called "residuals" every time a film or show they starred in is aired on network or cable—helpful when performers are between projects.

But today, streamers like Netflix and Disney+ do not disclose viewing figures for their shows, and offer the same flat rate for everything on their platforms, regardless of its popularity. Muddying the waters further is the issue of AI. Both actors and writers want guarantees to regulate its future use, but studios have so far refused to budge.—AFP



A supporter holds a "SAG-AFTRA Supports WGA" sign on the Hollywood writers picket line outside Universal Studios Hollywood in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



## Sports

# Medvedev admits he is wary of Alcaraz's 'one brutal shot'

## Medvedev triumphs over 43rd-ranked Eubanks

**LONDON:** Daniil Medvedev admits he is wary of Carlos Alcaraz's "one brutal shot" which could kill off his hopes of upsetting the world's top player in their Wimbledon semi-final. Medvedev battled back to defeat unseeded Christopher Eubanks in five sets and reach the last four at the All England Club for the first time on Wednesday. He will face the top seed and reigning US Open champion Alcaraz with a healthy respect for the Spaniard's raw power. "If you give him one easy shot, you can be in trouble," said Medvedev.

"There are big chances you're going to get a winner with, let's say, Novak or Rafa (Nadal) - you kind of feel like you can have a chance to get to this shot. "But with Carlos, you're not going to get this one. One shot sometimes is brutal." Medvedev defeated Alcaraz at Wimbledon for the loss of just seven games in the second round in 2021, when the Spaniard was still 18. The Russian also has the experience of having beaten Novak Djokovic at a Slam, when he came out comfortably on top in the 2021 US Open final. Medvedev hopes his greater experience will prove crucial on Friday.

"I have played a lot of great players in my career. I managed to win many times. So I'm going to try to do my best. If I show my best, I'll have my chances," he insisted. On Wednesday, world number three Medvedev triumphed over 43rd-ranked Eubanks 6-4, 1-6, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-1. Medvedev hit

52 winners compared to Eubanks' 74 but crucially committed just a meagre 13 unforced errors to his opponent's 55. Eubanks, who had shocked fifth-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas in the previous round, was attempting to become just the third man to reach the semi-finals on debut.

However, the 27-year-old's challenge fizzled out in the final set of a bruising, big-hitting contest. "After the first set, I didn't want to go five sets but when I lost the third, I was happy to go five," said Medvedev, who fired 28 aces. "There were moments in the match when I was losing the game so to say and he was playing well. "I started to sink and make mistakes but after the third set I started to build something. I had more opportunities in the fourth set and after the tiebreak I played amazing."

Eubanks, the breakout performer of this year's tournament, had never previously got past the second round of a Slam before this year's Wimbledon. However, he leaves having hit an event-leading 102 aces and a tournament record 321 winners. His all-action game thrilled the All England Club crowds, although it left him nursing 26 double faults and 218 unforced errors over five rounds. Eubanks said he will not change his approach or style, which will lift him to the cusp of the top 30 next week. "I think it tells me that when I'm having fun and I'm playing carefree, I'm a pretty good tennis player," he said. — AFP



**WIMBLEDON:** Russia's Daniil Medvedev celebrates winning against US player Christopher Eubanks during their men's singles quarter-finals tennis match on the tenth day of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships. — AFP

## Philipsen bags 4th stage win of Tour de France

**MOULINS:** Belgian Jasper Philipsen sprinted to his fourth stage win on this year's Tour de France with a powerful last burst on stage 11 from Clermont-Ferrand to Moulins. The Alpein sprinter edged Dutch rider Dylan Groenewegen to the line on Wednesday with Phil Bauhaus in third. There was no change in the overall standings between race favorites Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej Pogacar. Philipsen has dominated the bunch sprints on this Tour although two of his three previous triumphs were garnered with some wobbly manoeuvres that had to be validated by the race commissaire. In the final sprint during his first win at Bayonne he appeared to swerve in front of Wout Van Aert.

He then won out after a series of falls at the Nogaro motorbike circuit. On the banks of the Garonne at Bordeaux for his third stage win he also appeared to cut off the path for Biniam Girmay, who waved his arms in anger before Philipsen was again cleared. "Looking back I never believed I had done anything wrong," Philipsen said Wednesday of the reviews. "It's been an incredible Tour so far." He was positive looking forwards too. "It looks like there might be three more stages that are possible to win, even if that will be

difficult to control," said Philipsen.

He was also starting to sound more confident of landing the overall green jersey once the race winds up in Paris on July 23. "I think I've made a good gap in the standings and that gives me a bit of comfort going into the Alps. "I'm super proud, I'm also really happy with my shape." Philipsen leads the sprint points race by 145 points, with Frenchman Bryan Coquard second on 178. Race leader Vingegaard and second-placed Pogacar remain separated by just 17 seconds, with Australian rider Jai Hindley in third at 2min 40sec.

### Vingegaard savoring moment

Pogacar clawed back a few seconds for a second time on stage nine after the Dane dropped his rival to gain 53 seconds on him in Laruns on stage five. Vingegaard, the defending champion, is relishing each day spent in the race leader's yellow jersey. "There's a lot of respect for the yellow jersey even if some guys don't care," said Vingegaard. "I enjoy wearing the yellow jersey every day, it's the nicest jersey in cycling." Stage 11 left the industrial city of Clermont-Ferrand, where the tyre company Michelin has its base, and headed north-east to Moulins as the action closes in on the Alps. It was a



**MOULINS:** Alpein-Deceuninck's Belgian rider Jasper Philipsen celebrates on the podium with the best sprinter's green jersey after winning the 11th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race on July 12, 2023. — AFP

largely flat stage raced under overcast skies with the temperatures down considerably from Tuesday's testing 38C peak. An escape group of three riders struck out from the start with Daniel Oss of Total Energies holding out longest before he was caught by the bunch 10km from Moulins. Neilson Powless of Education First took the polka dot climbing jersey after stage one and has stubbornly clung on to it.

The American team also lost their leader on stage one when Richard Carapaz fell, so the jersey has been a

fun form of consolation, albeit likely a temporary diversion. The American rider should hold on Thursday for the hilly run through the Beaujolais region before three straight mountain stages round out the week. On July 14, France's beloved Bastille Day national holiday, there is a summit finish at Le Grand Colombier - a regular obstacle on recent Tours. Saturday ends with a sensational downhill ride from Les Portes du Soleil, while Sunday should be a blockbuster climb at Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc. — AFP



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland

## McIlroy bullish on British Open despite drought

**LONDON:** Rory McIlroy is confident he bears no mental scars from his latest near-miss in a major championship as he prepares to return to the scene of his British Open triumph at Hoylake. The Northern Irishman secured his fourth major at the Royal Liverpool course in 2014, but has endured a nine-year drought since. McIlroy came agonizingly close to ending his long wait both at last year's British Open at St Andrews and the US Open last month, where he finished one shot behind Wyndham Clark.

But the world number three has finished in the top 10 in six of his last seven major appearances and believes that consistency will soon have its reward. "I was really happy with my performance (at the US Open). I thought I stuck to my game plan really well. I know my game is in good shape so, I'm excited about that," said McIlroy, who is in action at the Scottish Open this week. "I'm as close as I've ever been really. My consistency in performances, especially in the majors over the last couple years, is way better than it has been over the last few years."

"Having had a really good chance at St Andrews last year, having a really good chance in Los Angeles a few weeks ago, I need to keep putting myself in those positions. "Obviously the more times I go through them, even though I'm not getting the wins, it's going to stand by me for whenever I get myself in that position again." World number one Scottie Scheffler is also in action at The Renaissance Club in North Berwick this week as he gears up for the final major of the season. Scheffler has been even more consistent on tour this year, winning the Phoenix Open and the prestigious Players Championship.

But the American has also fallen just short in the majors. The 2022 Masters champion tied for 10th at Augusta before finishing joint second at the PGA Championship and third behind McIlroy at the US Open. "Golf is one of those games that you're never really satisfied, said Scheffler, who missed the cut at the Scottish Open 12 months ago. "You always want more. I want to win every time I tee it up. You win once and you want to win twice. "It's funny, as a kid, if you think you win once on the PGA Tour you'll be satisfied. And you win once and it's pretty fun and you want to win again and the cycle continues." — AFP

## Aussies urged to 'roll up sleeves'

**SYDNEY:** Eddie Jones demanded Thursday that Australia "roll up their sleeves" as he made five changes to his starting team to face Argentina after being thrashed by South Africa in his first game in charge. Among those missing for Saturday's clash in Sydney is injured co-captain Michael Hooper, with Fraser McReight replacing him at openside flanker. Another key change sees Mark Nawaqanitawase take over from Suliasi Vunivalu on the wing after the rugby league convert's flat performance in their 43-12 defeat to an understrength Springboks in Pretoria.

With the World Cup looming in September, Jones admitted Australia were outplayed by the world champions and said he expected better against an Argentina side that conceded seven tries to New Zealand in a 41-12 defeat at Mendoza last weekend. "As a squad

we're running a marathon this year, and we didn't get off the start line like we wanted to, but we get another opportunity to find our rhythm this weekend against a tough Argentinean side," said the coach. "We have two Tests on home soil this year, so we have to roll up our sleeves on Saturday and put in a performance that drives Australians to show pride in the Wallabies."

Jones cautioned that it will take time for the Wallabies to find their groove. "We are obviously a new team and a new coaching staff, so we are finding out where we are at," he said. In the only other backline change, Samu Kerevi, who has been battling a hamstring injury, replaces Reece Hodge at inside centre and partners Len Ikitau in midfield. Experienced playmaker Quade Cooper and scrum-half Nic White again run the engine room.

### 'Each moment'

Jed Holloway will wear the Wallabies jersey for the first time in 2023 after an injured Tom Hooper was ruled out. He lines up at blindside flanker alongside

## No intention of retiring yet, LeBron James says

**LOS ANGELES:** NBA star LeBron James ended speculation over his future on Wednesday, saying that he is not yet ready to retire and maintains his love for basketball. James responded to his team, the Los Angeles Lakers, losing the Western Conference final to eventual champions Denver in May, by saying he had "a lot to think about" amid reports he was considering walking away from the sport. But in a speech at the ESPY awards ceremony on Wednesday, James settled any fears he may be ready to quit.

"I don't care how many more points I score, or what I can or cannot do on the floor," James said after receiving the award for Best Record-Breaking Performance for passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the league's all-time leading scorer. "The real question for me is: Can I play without cheating this game? The day I can't give everything on the floor is the day I'll be done. Lucky for

you guys, that day is not today," he said. "In my 20 years playing this game and all the years before, I've never, ever cheated the game and I will never take it for granted," he added.

James, who will be 39 in December, dismissed suggestions that he wanted to continue playing in the NBA with one or both of his sons — his eldest son Bronny James, who will play college basketball next season at the University of Southern California, and could conceivably enter the NBA in time for the 2024-2025 campaign. But he said that coaching his sons has helped to maintain his enthusiasm. "You know what brings me back every year? It's watching and coaching my boys and their teammates," he said. "I see those kids and it brings me right back to why I play. Those kids get me back to where I need to be, just the pure love of this beautiful game. "So, yeah, I still got something left. A lot left," he added.



LeBron James

James explained his reflection after the loss to the Nuggets saying he had often had such questions for himself. "When the season ended, I said I wasn't sure if I was going to keep playing and I know a lot of experts told you guys what I said but I'm here now speaking for myself. "In that moment, I'm asking myself if I can still play without cheat-

ing the game — can I give everything to the game still? The truth is, I've been asking myself this question at the end of the season for a couple years now. I just never openly talked about it," he said. James signed a two-year contract extension with the Lakers last August that would keep him at the club through the 2024-2025 season. — AFP



Sports

# Martinez glad to join Barca after suffering against them

## New defender arrives on free transfer from Athletic Bilbao

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's new defender Inigo Martinez said he was glad to join a team he has regularly suffered against, at his presentation on Thursday. The 32-year-old Spanish centre-back arrived on a free transfer from Athletic Bilbao last week and admitted he has endured many difficult nights at Camp Nou against the Spanish champions. "Honestly, I've suffered every time I've come to Camp Nou, there's no game in which I've not ended up knackered," Martinez told reporters at Barcelona's training ground.

"The style of Barcelona takes you into their territory bit by bit, there are top quality players, whoever the opponent is pays a high price and feels it on the pitch. "You end up looking at the scoreboard and the minutes aren't passing, the game feels eternal." Martinez signed a deal with Barcelona until 2025 and said it was an easy choice, highlighting the appeal of working under coach Xavi Hernandez, despite the club's financial situation.

"It's not easy for anyone, but it doesn't matter, come on, this is Barcelona, the best team in

the world," said Martinez. "When they call you, it puts the shine into your eyes. You pack your bag quickly to come here. "Seeing Xavi play was amazing, so having him as a coach, I can't even tell you." Martinez only played 15 times in La Liga last season for Athletic because of a foot problem which continues to trouble him. The defender has worked by himself this week in training, unable to link up with his teammates yet as he recovers from plantar fasciitis.

Martinez confirmed he had a small operation on his foot to help his progress. "It felt a lot better after the operation, I've kept going with my work during the holidays," added Martinez. "An operation that lasted five minutes has helped me a lot." Martinez, who came through at Real Sociedad and played there for seven seasons in the top flight, moved to Athletic in January 2017. Athletic paid his 32 million euro (\$35 million) buy-out clause, which remains a club record fee. Martinez played 177 times for the Basques, scoring eight goals and winning the Spanish Super Cup in 2021, as well as reaching two Copa del Rey finals. — AFP



**SANT JOAN DESPI:** FC Barcelona's newly signed Spanish defender Inigo Martinez (right) signs contracts with FC Barcelona's President Joan Laporta during his official presentation at the Joan Gamper training ground on July 13, 2023. — AFP

## Cifuentes shines as LAFC sink St Louis

**MIAMI:** Champions Los Angeles FC won the battle of the top two in Major League Soccer's Western Conference on Wednesday with a 3-0 victory over St Louis City. The win moves LAFC within two points of the expansion team with both clubs having played 22 matches. Jose Cifuentes was the key man for the Californian team with a goal and assist as LAFC delivered a performance which suggested they are back to their best.

Ecuador international midfielder Cifuentes, who has been linked with a move to Scottish club Glasgow Rangers, showed great awareness as he fired a long ball over the top for Mexican Carlos Vela to run on to and blast home in the 72nd minute. Ten minutes later, Denis Bouanga broke down the left flank and squared into the path of Croatian Stipe Biuk who made no mistake. The win was wrapped up in stoppage time when Nathan Ordaz found Cifuentes and he delivered a blistering left-foot finish from the edge of the box.

Cifuentes is out of contract in De-

cember and Rangers are reported to be keen to purchase him in time for their upcoming season. The Seattle Sounders, third in the West, fell to a 2-0 defeat to fifth placed San Jose. A Cristian Espinoza penalty gave the Earthquakes a 19th minute lead and then Miguel Trauco scored a stunner when he superbly volleyed home from outside the box, from a corner from Espinoza. In the Eastern Conference, FC Cincinnati maintained their eight point lead at the top over the New England Revolution thanks to a 2-1 win at the New York Red Bulls.

The Ohio side had to come from behind after an Omir Fernandez penalty gave the Red Bulls a 28th minute lead, but ten minutes from the end Cincinnati scored from the spot themselves, through Argentine Luciano Acosta. The 14th win of the season came deep in stoppage time from Obinna Nwobodo whose shot got through the body of Red Bulls keeper Carlos Coronel. Cincinnati were without striker Brandon Vazquez and defender Matt Miazga, both on Gold Cup duty with



**LOS ANGELES:** Jose Cifuentes #11 of Los Angeles FC celebrates a goal at Banc of California Stadium in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

the United States and assistant coach Dom Kinnear said they had shown their character.

"The spirit and the toughness of the group is excellent, and when you have players like Luciano Acosta, when he's on the field, he's always going to be a goal threat and he's always going to give you a chance to win games," he said. The Revolution kept up the chase

with a 2-1 win over Atlanta but third-placed Nashville saw their ten match unbeaten home run end with a 2-0 defeat to the Philadelphia Union. A feisty match, decided by two penalties from Hungarian midfielder Daniel Gazdag, saw three players sent off including the Union's Julian Carranza and Nashville's Shaquell Moore following a stoppage time tussle. — AFP

## Ronaldo's Al-Nassr under provisional transfer ban

**LAUSANNE:** Cristiano Ronaldo's Saudi club Al-Nassr are banned from registering new players until unpaid debts are settled, FIFA said on Thursday. The team "is currently prevented from registering new players due to outstanding debts", a FIFA spokesperson told AFP, without revealing the amount of the debts. World football's governing body did not say whether Croatia midfielder Marcelo Brozovic's recent transfer from Inter Milan would be affected by the sanction.

"The relevant bans will be lifted immediately upon the settlement of the debts being confirmed by the creditors concerned," the spokesperson added. In October 2021, Al-Nassr were ordered by a FIFA-appointed judge to pay Leicester City 460,000 euros (\$514,000) plus interest in a dispute over the transfer of Nigeria international Ahmed Musa. Musa joined Al-Nassr for 18 million euros in 2018. He left two years later and played for Turkey's Sivasspor last season.

According to the ruling at the time, in the event of non-payment Al-Nassr could be banned from recruiting players for up to "three entire and consecutive registration periods". Backed by the Gulf state's sovereign wealth fund, the Saudi Pro League is luring big names from the major European leagues with the promise of huge salaries. Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard took over as coach at Al-Ettifaq earlier this month, while Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kante have also made the move to the oil-rich Gulf state since Ronaldo's switch to Al-Nassr in January started the trend. — AFP

## Tall order for Dutch to match 2019 WCup run

**AUCKLAND:** The Netherlands reached the final of the last Women's World Cup but a repeat looks a tall order for a side who have seen an inspirational coach depart and lost their star striker to a serious knee injury. The Dutch only appeared at their first World Cup in 2015 and followed that by winning the European Championship as hosts two years later under Sarina Wiegman. Then came that remarkable run to the World Cup final in France in 2019, when they defeated Canada, Japan and Sweden before a 2-0 loss to the United States.

Their hopes of building on that were dealt a blow when Wiegman left to take the England job after the Dutch went out of the Tokyo Olympics on penalties to the United States in the quarter-finals. Her successor Mark Parsons was sacked after a last-eight exit to France at last year's Euro, which was won by Wiegman's England. Andries Jonker was then brought in before they wrapped up World Cup qualifying.

They sealed their place at the finals starting next week in Australia and New Zealand with relative ease, only to lose the prolific Vivianne Miedema to a

ruptured ACL. The 26-year-old netted three times at the 2019 World Cup and is the all-time top scorer for the Dutch team. On July 27 the Netherlands will meet holders the United States once more, this time in a Group E which also contains Vietnam and Portugal. It would be a massive shock if the Dutch and Americans fail to reach the knockout rounds.

### 'Make that dream a reality'

Despite the chasm left by Miedema's absence the Dutch believe they can go all the way in Australia and New Zealand. "Yes, you do dream about that," winger Lieke Martens, of Paris Saint-Germain, told FIFA.com. "And I think it is very good that you keep trying to make that dream a reality." Martens, now 30, was the standout player when the Netherlands won Euro 2017 and was named UEFA player of the year off the back of that. She also won the Champions League with Barcelona in 2021. "If we were to win, it would be complete. I would have won everything that I ever dreamt of winning," she added.

"It will be a tough challenge, but nothing is impossible." The majority of the Dutch squad play for leading European clubs, including midfielder Danielle van de Donk at French champions Lyon and defender Dominique Janssen at Wolfsburg in Germany. Jill Roord is another to watch. The 26-year-old ex-Arsenal midfielder has just left Wolfsburg to join Manchester City for a reported club-record fee. Roord was a substitute in the 2019 final, coming on for Martens, but is set to have a



**BURTON-ON-TRENT:** England's Dutch head coach Sarina Wiegman (center) takes a team training session at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, central England. — AFP

starting role this time.

Coach Jonker might not have the aura of Wiegman, but he has an impressive CV, having worked as the assistant to Louis van Gaal at Barcelona and Bayern Munich, been head of the Arsenal academy, and coached Wolfsburg in the men's Bundesliga. "Suddenly, after the Euro win, people expect a lot from us," added Martens. "People expect us to always be able to battle for the grand prizes, and we have given ourselves that standard." The character in the team is back and maybe we can achieve something beautiful again at this World Cup. — AFP

## Kuwait's fencers grab golds at Arab Sports Games

**ALGIERS:** The Kuwaiti fencing teams, taking part in the Arab Sports Games in Algiers, won two gold medals on Wednesday - the fourth day of the championship, raising their tally of medals to 11. The epee fencers Abdulaziz Al-Shatti, Ali Al-Nakkas, Abdulrahman Al-Yaqout and Hassan Al-Foudry won the first gold. Their compatriots Bander Al-Shamlan, Ali Fadel, Abdulaziz Du'aj and Mohammad Mahdi claimed the title of the sabre fencing competition. The results of today's competitions raised Kuwait's tally to 11, including the two golds, four silver and five bronze. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### Hospitals

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

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### Change of Name

I, **Abbas Ali**, holder of Indian Passport No. P7118093, having permanent address 14, Gali G, Kharol Colony, Fatehpura, Girwa, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India-313001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as **Abbas Ali** (given name) and **Hita** (surname). **(C#3830) 14/07/2023**

I, **Zarina Abbas Ali**, holder of Indian Passport No. S5547730, having permanent address 14, Gali G, Kharol Colony, Fatehpura, Girwa, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India-313001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as **Zarina** (given name) and **Hita** (surname). **(C#3830) 14/07/2023**

I, **RATANAN GOVINDU PASPELETI** holder of Passport No. L1167437 do hereby change my name to PASUPULETI VENKATA RATHNAM (as given name) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **PASUPULETI VENKATA RATHNAM** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. **14/07/2023**

I, **Santosh**, holder of Indian Passport No. L3857518, do hereby change my name to **Santosh** (as given name) and **Panchal** (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **Santosh Panchal** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my

documents. **(C#3829) 13/07/2023**

I, **Abu Waquase**, (Given Name) holding Indian Passport No. T1936751 issued at Kuwait on 31/12/2018 hereby announce to change my name as **Abu Waquase** (Given Name) and **Siddique** (surname) for all purposes. **(C#3828) 13/07/2023**

I, **Kalamarala Subbaiah**, holder of Indian Passport No. M2310696, having permanent address 3-40-2-7, Vasavi Nagar, Kadiri, Sri Sathya Sai, Pin - 515591, Andhra Pradesh, India residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: **Mahmoud** and surname: **Sunkara**. **(C#3826) 12/07/2023**



## Ons Jabeur: Comeback queen

Tunisian trailblazer to clash with Vondrousova for Wimbledon title



WIMBLEDON: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrates winning against Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka during their women's singles semifinals at The All England Lawn Tennis Club on July 13, 2023. — AFP

**LONDON:** Ons Jabeur and Marketa Vondrousova will meet in Saturday's Wimbledon women's final, helping the All England avoid a potentially embarrassing diplomatic headache. Tunisian world number six Jabeur fought back from a set and 4-2 down to defeat Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-3 to reach a second successive final at the tournament. Czech left-hander Vondrousova ended Elina Svitolina's dream of delivering a Grand Slam title for Ukraine with a comfortable 6-3, 6-3 win, becoming the first unseeded woman to make the final in 60 years.

Had Sabalenka gone on to win the title on Saturday, she would have received the trophy from Princess Catherine, the wife of the heir to the British throne, a year after all Belarusian and Russian players were banned from the tournament following the invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key ally of Moscow. If she had reached the final, Svitolina would have maintained her policy of not shaking hands with Russian and Belarusian rivals in protest at the war.

Tunisian trailblazer Jabeur has now fought back three times from dropping the first set at this year's tournament. "I'm very proud of myself because maybe old me would have lost the match today and went back home already but I'm glad that I kept digging deep and finding the strength," she said. Saturday's final will be her third at the Slams after losing to Elena Rybakina at Wimbledon and Iga Swiatek at the US Open last year.

"I'm learning to transform the bad energy into a good one so the anger that I had from the first set I tried to stay focused. Some things I have no control over. She can ace any time, she can hit a big serve even if I have a break point and that's frustrating a bit but I'm glad that I'm accepting it and digging deep to go and win this match and hopefully the tournament."

Sabalenka, 25, playing in her fourth successive Grand Slam semi-final and sixth in total, recovered from 2/4 down in the tiebreak to clinch the first set. She also unleashed the fastest women's serve at Wimbledon this year with a 121 mph (194.7 km/h) rocket. Sabalenka, who had defeated Jabeur on her way to the last four at Wimbledon in 2021, broke for a 3-2 lead in the second set. That stretched to 4-2 before Jabeur hit back from the brink to reel off the next four games and level the contest. Sabalenka's spirit ebbed away and she was broken in the sixth game of the decider before Jabeur claimed victory on a fifth match point with a clean ace.

### 'Lot of responsibility'

Sabalenka hit 39 winners but committed 45 unforced errors as her hopes of adding the Wimbledon title to her Australian Open victory and of taking Swiatek's world number one ranking were dashed. "I had so many opportunities and didn't use them. She played better in the key moments," said the Belarusian. World number 42 Vondrousova will be playing in her

second Grand Slam final after finishing runner-up at the 2019 French Open.

On Thursday, the 24-year-old was rewarded for her attacking approach, breaking serve six times and hitting 22 winners to Svitolina's nine. "I cannot believe it. I am very happy that I made the final. Elina is such a fighter and a great person," said the Czech. "I was crazy nervous." Reaching the final comes after a miserable time for the Czech — she underwent a second wrist operation last year, which ruled her out for a huge chunk of 2022.

World number 76 Svitolina, who only returned to the sport from maternity leave in April, dropped serve three times in the opening set. She managed to retrieve the first to level at 3-3 but the Czech broke again in the seventh and ninth games to edge ahead. An error-plagued Svitolina quickly fell 4-0 down in the second set. However, Vondrousova, who had seen off four seeded players to reach the semi-finals, suddenly suffered mid-set jitters as she handed back the breaks to allow Svitolina to pull to 3-4.

Svitolina then undid all her hard work to be broken again in the eighth game before pushing a forehand long to hand her opponent a place in the final. Svitolina said representing war-torn Ukraine was a major motivating factor but added: "It's a lot of responsibility, a lot of tension. I try to balance it as much as I can. But, yeah, sometimes it gets maybe too much." — AFP

## Messi set for busy, hype-packed first week in Miami

**FORT LAUDERDALE:** Lionel Messi's hopes of enjoying a quieter life in Florida for the final years of his career may prove to be wishful thinking with the Argentine star already lined up for a whole series of publicity events. Messi will take part in a glitzy presentation at the club's stadium on Sunday which has been branded "The Unveil" with the club promising musical entertainment for the expected capacity 18,000 crowd. The event will be broadcast on Apple TV and parts of it are sure to be syndicated to other television networks.

Then the following day, Inter Miami have announced a "major press conference" with Messi expected to attend along with the club's owners, probably including co-owner David Beckham. Tuesday is earmarked to be Messi's first full training session with his new team-mates but if he thought that would simply be a case of shaking hands and getting back on the field, he may be in for a surprise.

While the World Cup winner is used to practising behind closed doors, this session will be open - for part of the session - to the media with television cameras trained on the 36-year-old's every move. When announcing his intention to join Miami last month, Messi gave several reasons why he had turned down other options but stated the hope for a calmer life was one of them. "I'm also at a point where I want to get out of the spotlight a bit, to think more about my family," he said.

On top of all those club commitments, the shy, introverted Messi is certain to be encouraged to give time for MLS's broadcast partner, Apple TV, who are hoping that the Argentine will help boost subscriptions to their 'MLS Season Pass' product. Messi arrived in Miami on Tuesday, flying in on a private jet with his family and sources said that he had visited the team's training facility early on Wednesday.



MIAMI: A woman takes photo of her children in front of Argentine artist Maximiliano Bagnasco's giant mural of international soccer star Lionel Messi in Wynwood, Miami's art district, in Miami, Florida. — AFP

Inter Miami's media sessions have tended to attract around a dozen reporters but there were at least five-times that amount on Wednesday.

### 'Big change' for all

Beckham also turned out for the training session, kicking a ball around while wearing a T-shirt, sunglasses and sneakers. With many South American media outlets having Miami-based correspondents, Miami players are already facing a very different level of interest. "It's a big change. I don't know what to say, but I know it's a big change not only for the club, but also for the city. It's very important for everyone and we have to enjoy it," said Venezuelan striker Josef Martinez. Goalkeeper Drake Callender said the team would have to learn to cope with the newfound attention.

"We are all professionals...we are all focused on the weekend (game) but with all of this, it's something that is a reality for us and the best thing we can do is just focus on our training. "We have a lot of younger kids or players in the group and for them, with media around, security around, it may be a little different," he said. Messi's new team are currently bottom of the Eastern Conference with just five wins from 21 games and are ranked 28th of the 29 team across MLS. Callender says they need to change that quickly. — AFP

## Panama stun US, set up Gold Cup final with Mexico

**MIAMI:** Panama stunned the United States on Wednesday by winning their CONCACAF Gold Cup semi-final 5-4 on penalties in San Diego to set up a final with Mexico. Mexico, record eight-times Gold Cup champions, reached Sunday's decider with a 3-0 win over Jamaica in Las Vegas. Mexico will start as favourites against a Panama team that have never won the regional competition for North and Central America and the Caribbean --- but have reached the final twice before, losing to the USA in 2005 and 2013.

The USA, who selected a squad without their main Europe-based players, miss out on a place in the final for only the second time since 2003. They bowed out on penalties after the game ended 1-1 after extra-time. "Getting into this final is the dream of every Panamanian. We had to suffer to get this victory but that is how it is best savoured," said Panama coach Thomas Christiansen. The USA started brightly in the late afternoon Californian sunshine, with Cade Cowell hitting the post in the first minute.

Panama had an effort from Edgar Barcenan in the 29th ruled out for offside and American goalkeeper Matt Turner had to be alert in the 53rd minute to keep out a header from Ismael Diaz. Brandon Vazquez, given a start after three goals in the tournament as a substitute, then missed a good opportunity, firing high from close range after good work from Cowell. There was drama in stoppage time when Diaz had the ball in the net but was flagged for offside. Panama claimed that Djordje Mihailovic had handled the ball but VAR found nothing and backed the offside call.

The USA had needed extra-time and penalties to get past Canada in their quarter-final, but they were short of creativity against a determined Panama. Panama grabbed the lead in the ninth minute of the first period of extra-time when Adalberto Carrasquilla lofted the ball over the top and Ivan Anderson



SAN DIEGO: Cristian Martinez (left) #6 of Panama and DeJuan Jones #15 of United States fight for the ball during the semifinals of the CONCACAF Gold Cup at Snapdragon Stadium on July 12, 2023. — AFP

went round the out-rushing Turner and slotted into the unguarded goal. But six minutes later the USA leveled through a Jesus Ferreira volley after Jordan Morris had headed down a long ball into the box.

With both sides tiring in the heat, the game went to the shoot-out. There was an unsavoury moment when US defender Matt Miazga, after converting his kick, shouted in the face of Cecilio Waterman as he walked up to the spot. The Panama forward kept his cool and slotted home. That kick took the contest into sudden death and goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera was the hero, diving to save Cristian Roldan's effort. That left Carrasquilla needing to convert for victory and the midfielder made no mistake to set off the celebrations for the Central Americans.

USA interim coach BJ Callaghan, who will now be replaced by the returning Gregg Berhalter, said despite the defeat his young team had gained valuable tournament experience. "What I said to the guys was I'm super proud of them. I'm super proud that they stuck together, they continued to respond to adversity," he said. "This is going to hurt in the short term, but I truly believe in the long term we've gotten a lot of players a lot of experience, and it's going to pay dividends for us in the future." —AFP