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## July set to be hottest ever

Mercury to rise in Kuwait • Greece facing longest heatwave • US braces for record heat

### Revised iqama draft law to be sent to Cabinet

**KUWAIT:** Informed sources revealed a new law regulating the residence of foreigners will return to the fore again, to be voted on by the National Assembly during the next parliamentary session. The bill underwent a radical revision in the past weeks of most of its articles, with the aim of putting an end to iqama trading. "The proposal will be presented to the Cabinet first for discussion and approval before referring it to the National Assembly as a matter of urgency," sources revealed to Kuwait Times.

"A team including representatives of the fatwa and legislation department, legal affairs department at the ministry of interior, Civil Service Commission, Kuwaiti jurists at Kuwait University and

representatives from health insurance companies reviewed the law again, studying all observations raised previously. The law will be ready for adoption by the Cabinet during the current summer session, to be referred to the National Assembly before the start of the next session at the end of October," the sources said.

"According to the new proposal, an expatriate will be granted a residence permit not exceeding five years. Investors will be given a residence permit of up to 15 years, depending on the activity they practice. Moreover, fees will be imposed so that Kuwait can benefit from these investments," sources explained.

Sources added that the proposal also includes giving 10-year residence permits to children of Kuwaiti women. "Residency permits will be given to a person who owns property in Kuwait, provided they are not absent from Kuwait for a period of more than six months, with the exception of children of Kuwaiti women. Domestic workers will only be allowed to travel outside Kuwait for four months, after which their residency permit will be revoked," sources added.

**KUWAIT/ATHENS:** Greece was Saturday bracing for its longest heatwave on record as weekend temperatures were forecast to soar above 40 Celsius, while a record-breaking heatwave stretching across the southern United States was expected to expand in the coming days. Tens of millions of people in the northern hemisphere have been suffering through intense heat this summer as the world appears headed for its hottest July on record.

In Kuwait, Al-Ojairi Scientific Center said from July 29, the country will witness a new phase of summer linked to the start of the Mirzam season. "The Mirzam season is characterized by high temperatures, as the heat reaches its most intense period and humidity rises in coastal areas in preparation for a gradual decrease in temperatures, marking the end of summer," the center said.

As temperature records tumble, experts have pointed to climate change driven by the burning of fossil fuels, saying global warming is playing a key role in destructive weather. Already 11 days into its heatwave, Greece's national weather institute warned reprieve was still days away, setting this up to be the longest hot spell the country has ever seen. "According to the data, we will probably go through

16-17 days of a heatwave, which has never happened before in our country," Kostas Lagouvardos, the director of research at the National Observatory, told ERT television Saturday.

The previous heatwave record in Greece was set in 1987, when scorching temperatures of over 39C lasted 11 days. Across the southern United States, about 80 million Americans will swelter in temperatures of 41C and above this weekend, the National Weather Service (NWS) said. The country's worst heat of up to 46C is forecast for Phoenix, Arizona, which has seen a record-breaking three weeks in a row of highs above 43C.

Tourists, meanwhile, have been flocking to Death Valley National Park, which straddles the border between California and Nevada, to post selfies with a temperature display outside the visitor center. Many are hoping to see it break a world record of 56.7C, which was set in July 1913 but was likely the result of a faulty measurement, according to several meteorologists.

Regardless, July 2023 is on track to be the hottest month — not only since records began, but also in "hundreds, if not thousands, of years", leading NASA climatologist Gavin Schmidt said.

Continued on Page 6

### Women torch houses after Manipur video



**THOUBAL, India:** Women burn the house of one of the men accused of parading two women naked in front of a mob in Manipur state in Wangjing Awang Leika village on July 21, 2023. — AFP

**NEW DELHI:** Furious women set fire to the houses of two Indian men accused of parading two women naked in a state where months of ethnic clashes have left at least 120 dead, images showed Friday. A clip went viral Wednesday showing two women reported to be from the Kuki tribal group walking naked along a street while being jeered at and harassed by a mob reportedly from the Meitei community. Violence erupted in the northeastern state of Manipur between the mainly Christian Kuki and the predominantly Hindu Meitei in May over job quotas and land rights, and intermittent clashes have continued since.

The emergence of footage of the women's humiliation — which happened in May — triggered outrage across the country, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying it had "shamed India". Police arrested four suspects Thursday, and the same day a group of women activists threw stacks of hay into the house of one of the men in Imphal and set it on fire. As the fire raged, the women — from the Meitei community, like the accused — broke down the walls and roof of the house with sticks. On Friday, another mob of women destroyed the house of a second accused, reducing it to ash and bars, photographs showed.

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### Iraqis protest after Denmark Quran burning

**BAGHDAD:** Iraqi security forces on Saturday dispersed about 1,000 supporters of Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr who tried to march to Baghdad's Green Zone housing foreign embassies after a Holy Quran was desecrated in Denmark. On its Facebook page, the extreme right group Danske Patriotet posted on Friday a video of a man burning what seemed to be a Holy Quran and trampling an Iraqi flag.

Copenhagen police deputy chief Trine Fisker told AFP that "not more than a handful" of protesters had gathered Friday across from the Iraqi embassy. "I can also confirm there was a book burnt. We do not know which book it was," she said. Hours later, the Danish Refugee Council office in Iraq's main southern city of Basra came under armed attack, its executive director for the Middle East, Litu Thapa, said.

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**BAGHDAD:** Followers of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr protest near Baghdad's Green Zone a day after a burning of the Holy Quran on July 22, 2023. — AFP

### Sweaty robot to show impact of soaring heat

**PHOENIX:** What happens to the body when a human gets heatstroke? How can we protect ourselves in a warming planet? To answer these burning questions, Arizona researchers have deployed a robot that can breathe, shiver and sweat. The southwestern state's capital Phoenix is currently enduring its longest heat wave in history: On Friday, the mercury exceeded 43 degrees Celsius for the 22nd day in a row, an ominous demonstration of what's to come in a world impacted by climate change.

For humans, such heat represents a potentially lethal threat, one that is still not fully understood. But for ANDI — a one-of-a-kind humanoid robot at Arizona State University — it's a lovely day out. "He's the world's first outdoor thermal mannequin that we can routinely take outside and ... measure



**PHOENIX:** Humanoid robot ANDI stands next to equipment monitoring environmental conditions as researchers conduct a heat and wind experiment to learn more about the effect of heat exposure on the human body at Arizona State University (ASU) on July 20, 2023. — AFP

how much heat he is receiving from the environment," mechanical engineering professor Konrad Rykaczewski told AFP.

ANDI is "a very realistic way to experimentally measure how a human person responds to extreme climate" without putting people themselves at risk, Rykaczewski says. At first glance, ANDI — which stands for Advanced Newton Dynamic Instrument — resembles a simple crash-test dummy. But its epoxy/carbon fiber

skin conceals a treasure trove of technology, such as a network of connected sensors that assess heat diffused through the body.

ANDI also has an internal cooling system and pores allowing it to breathe and sweat. There are 35 independent thermal zones and, like humans, the robot — which cost more than half a million dollars to build — sweats more from its back. Until now, only a dozen or so mannequins of this type existed.

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### Google testing AI news writing tool

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Google is working with news publishers to design a new AI-backed tool to help journalists report and write their stories, the company said. The project was first reported by The New York Times, which is working with The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal in testing the new product. Citing anonymous sources, the report said the tool — known internally as Genesis — was in an early testing stage, but impressive enough to be found "unsettling" by some of the news executives that saw its capabilities.

A Google spokeswoman said in a statement that "in partnership with news publishers, especially smaller publishers, we're in the earliest stages of exploring ideas to potentially provide AI-enabled tools to help their journalists with their work". She added that "quite simply, these tools are not intended to, and cannot, replace the essential role journalists have in reporting, creating and fact-checking their articles."

The tool would function as a sort of co-pilot for reporters and editors by providing options for headlines or different writing styles, the company said. The Google project follows news of a tie-up between OpenAI and The Associated Press, in which the ChatGPT creator was given a license to use the archives of AP going back to 1985 to train AI. — AFP





## Local

# GCC-Central Asia Summit opens new horizons for cooperation

## Leaders vow to strengthen cooperation, promote regional stability



JEDDAH: The leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries take a group photo with the leaders of the five Central Asian countries participating in a summit in Jeddah. — KUNA

JEDDAH: Leaders of the six GCC member states and the five Central Asian countries (C5) adopted a joint statement at the conclusion of the GCC-Central Asia Summit, affirming the importance of strengthening cooperation in various areas to promote regional stability. The meeting, chaired by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, gathered the leaders of the GCC and Central Asian countries and the Secretary-General of the GCC, Jassem Al-Budaiwi.



Jassem Al-Budaiwi

The leaders congratulated Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the success of the Hajj season for the year 1444H and the high level it achieved in serving the pilgrims and providing them with the necessary care, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing the joint statement.

Based on common values, interests, and deep historical ties between the GCC countries and Central Asian countries, the leaders stressed the importance of strengthening political and strategic relations between the two sides at the collective and bilateral levels and continuing political coordination in order to achieve regional and international security and stability, face challenges, and work to ensure the flexibility of supply chains, transportation and communication, food security, energy security, and water security.

"The leaders praised the cultural diversity, openness, and rich history of the countries of the Council and Central Asia and stressed that tolerance and peaceful coexistence are among the most important values and principles for relations between nations and societies. In this regard, the leaders welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2686, by which the Council recognized that hate speech, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, gender discrimination, and acts of extremism can contribute to the outbreak, escalation, and recurrence of conflicts," the statement reads.

### Racism and Islamophobia

They expressed concern about the growing rhetoric of racism and Islamophobia and acts of violence against Muslim minorities and Islamic symbols. The leaders praised the results and goals of the Conference of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which has been held in Kazakhstan since 2003 in order to discuss global guidelines for achieving respect and tolerance among races and religions.

The leaders praised the results of the Bahrain Dialogue Forum "East and West for Human Coexistence", which was held in 2022 in the Kingdom of Bahrain under the patronage of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in cooperation with the Sheikh of Al Azhar and Pope of the Vatican.

They stressed the importance of strengthening the strategic and political dialogue between the countries of the Cooperation Council and Central Asia and strengthening this partnership towards new horizons in various fields, including political and security dialogue, economic and investment cooperation, enhancing communication between peoples, and exchanging best practices and expertise in all fields such as education, culture, youth affairs, tourism, media, and sports, in accordance with the agreed joint action plan for the period 2023-2027.

They commended the outcomes of the joint ministerial meeting of the strategic dialogue between the GCC and Central Asian countries, which was held on September 7, 2022, and the technical meetings held between officials and specialists from both sides in the fields of economic cooperation, trade, investment, health, culture, youth, and sports.

Also, the leaders urged the concerned authorities to take the necessary measures for the immediate implementation of the joint action plan at the bilateral and multilateral levels to enhance joint cooperation in various fields. In the economic field, the leaders emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to enhance trade and economic cooperation and encourage joint investment by strengthening relations between financial and economic institutions and business sectors on both sides to explore areas of



JEDDAH: This handout picture shows the portraits of (left to right) Kuwait's Amir HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Qatar's Amir Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Oman's Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, and UAE's President Mohamed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan at the Gulf-Central Asia summit. — AFP

cooperation and available opportunities and provide an attractive climate for business, trade, joint investments, and economic cooperation in order to achieve mutual benefit.

### Opportunities, investments

The Asian leaders also called for achieving integration between available opportunities and developing investment fields, discussing development priorities, and exchanging experiences in light of the joint action plan. They affirmed their support for the candidacy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to host Expo 2030 in Riyadh and to exert all efforts to support this nomination, stressing the importance of organizing international and regional exhibitions and active participation in them to stimulate economic and cultural exchanges between Central Asia and the GCC region. They emphasized the importance of continuing cooperation between the Cooperation Council and Central Asia in international forums and organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to confront the economic challenges facing the world.

On climate change, the joint statement said, "The leaders praised the pioneering role played by the two sides in confronting the climate change phenomenon and renewed their welcome and support to the United Arab Emirates for hosting the COP28 conference to support international efforts in this regard. As developing countries, the leaders emphasized the principles and provisions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, especially fairness and the principle of shared responsibilities, taking into account different national circumstances and priorities."

"COP28 will provide an opportunity to assess these issues and progress in collective efforts to implement these international agreements," according to the statement. The leaders stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation in the field of environment and climate change, protecting glaciers and water resources, and attracting more investments to the main sectors of the economies of Central Asian countries to adapt to climate change through integration and cooperation on the risks and consequences of natural disasters between the two sides.

### Transportation routes

The leaders underlined the importance of developing connected transportation routes between the two regions, building strong logistical and commercial networks, and developing effective systems that contribute to the exchange of products. They pledged to enhance cooperation in the fields of higher education, scientific research, and vocational training, encourage cooperation between universities and scientific research centers on both sides, and provide educational opportunities in technical universities, wherever possible, for students from the GCC and Central Asian countries, as well as exchange of experience and expertise through communication between experts and education specialists.

### Health field

The Asian leaders expressed their aspirations to enhance cooperation in the health field, exchange experiences among specialized institutions in various health fields, and support global initiatives to address current and future epidemics, health risks, and challenges. In this context, they highlighted Kazakhstan's initiative to create a special multilateral body in the United Nations, the International Agency for Biosafety, which was announced at the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Agency is intended to contribute to the prevention of biological threats and the exchange of data on dangerous diseases. In the field of cultural and humanitarian cooperation, including the media and social fields, emphasis was placed on the importance of protecting the common cultural heritage between the two sides, elevating joint cultural and media cooperation, encouraging cultural dialogue between the two sides, and discussing opportunities to develop cooperation in all fields to serve joint interests.

The leaders emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation in the fields of youth and sports, exchanging experiences, and coordinating electoral positions in regional, continental, and international sports federations. They noted that Qatar will host the 2023 AFC Asian Cup matches. "The leaders emphasized the importance of bolstering cooperation in the fields of green energy economy, digital economy, innovation, and green technology. They highlighted the need for investments to implement new projects in these crucial areas between the two sides." The leaders welcomed the decision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to host the "GCC-Central Asia Investment Forum in the last quarter of 2023."

They also welcomed the initiatives of the Republic of Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to host the Forum in 2024. Regional and international issues are discussed with concerted efforts to achieve peace, security, stability, and prosperity worldwide. They emphasized the priority of restoring international peace and security through mutual respect and cooperation between countries to achieve development and progress.

They highlighted the principles of good neighborliness, respect for the sovereignty of states, their territorial integrity, and political independence, non-interference in their internal affairs, non-use or threat of force, and the protection of the international order based on adherence to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The leaders affirmed that the increasing risk of a nuclear confrontation between nuclear-armed countries constitutes a serious and unacceptable threat to international peace and security and that the use of nuclear weapons should never be allowed. They expressed their condemnation of terrorism, whatever its sources, the rejection of all its forms and manifestations, and the drying up of its funding sources. They expressed their determination to strengthen regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and extremism and to prevent the financing, arming, and recruitment of terrorist groups by all individuals and entities. — KUNA



Kuwait's Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

## Crown Prince calls for stability, hails Asian leaders

JEDDAH: Coordination between the countries of the Cooperation Council and the countries of Central Asia is essential to enhancing the security, development, and stability of the region, Kuwait's Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, said on Wednesday. Representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at a meeting between GCC countries and Central Asian states, His Highness the Crown Prince said in a speech that current circumstances require more work and coordination of efforts at the regional level, which makes it imperative for the countries to "work together to face the challenges surrounding the region".

He praised the role that Central Asian countries have played in supporting regional security and stability "through their stances in support of just causes internationally."

His Highness the Crown Prince began his speech by conveying the greetings of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He went on to express appreciation to the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and to the Saudi government and its generous people for their warm reception and hospitality.

His Highness the Crown Prince added that he was pleased at Kuwait's participation in the first meeting of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the leaders of the Central Asian countries, which represents a new building block and a great addition to the path of relations between the two sides, and noted that such cooperation reflects the common desire to move forward to develop and strengthen such relations to include broader and more comprehensive cooperation in various fields.

He said such cooperation would serve the common interests of both sides and would strengthen and deepen relations. He also hoped that the meeting would contribute to strengthening and consolidating the strategic partnership relations between the two sides through what was approved in the Joint Ministerial Council meeting on September 7, 2022, and the adoption of the Joint Action Plan (2023-2027).

His Highness the Crown Prince also noted that they look forward to more cooperation in the political, security, economic, cultural, scientific, and trade fields, stressing the importance of continuous consultation to continue further cooperation in all fields and to enhance security and stability and achieve prosperity in all our countries. The Representative of Kuwait, Amir, added that he is pleased to commend the positions of the Central Asian countries, which are highly appreciated by the GCC countries for their constant and unwavering commitment to just international issues and their continuous cooperation and coordination with the GCC countries to lay the foundations for security and stability in the region.

His Highness the Crown Prince also praised the Central Asian countries for their positions on various Islamic, Arab, regional, and international issues, expressing confidence in their keenness to continue this path and their efforts. His Highness the Crown Prince said the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have a firm belief and a firm conviction that the current circumstances require more work and coordination of efforts at the regional level. At the end, His Highness the Crown Prince asked Allah Almighty to protect all of the participants' homelands, provide them with security, safety, development, and prosperity, and grant them success. — KUNA

## Kuwait's contribution to Jerusalem agency 'crucial'

RABAT: Bayt Mal Al-Qods Acharief Agency is a guardian of Jerusalem's identity and supporter of the Palestinians there in the face of occupation that plots to transform the holy city identity and erase its history. Kuwait's financial contributions to the agency are crucial for performing its tasks of safeguarding Arab and Muslim rights in Jerusalem and supporting the Palestinian population there.

Salem Al-Sharqawi, the acting director general of the agency, told KUNA on Saturday that the Kuwaiti contribution boosts its action to preserve the spiritual and civic identity of Jerusalem and back the Palestinian populace, in the face of ongoing bids by the occupation forces to Judaize the city, alter its identity and force its inhabitants to flee it. He noted that Kuwait contributed with

one million dollars in 2008 to fund projects supervised by the agency.

The agency, established in 1998 with an initiative by the late Moroccan King Al-Hasan II in his capacity as the chairperson of Jerusalem Committee, plays a crucial role in safeguarding Arab and Muslim rights in the sacred city and backing the natives through various social, cultural and economic ventures. Such projects funded by the agency face the occupation authorities' conspiracies to Judaize the city and scratch off its Islamic identity. The agency, supervised by King Mohammed VI, is the executive arm of Jerusalem Committee, taking charge of protecting the city cultural heritage, maintaining its legal status and religious manifestations.

Al-Sharqawi said in the interview with

KUNA that the monarch's direct supervision over the agency constitutes a guarantee for it to pursue its tasks for serving the city and backing its steadfast residents. The agency, since 25 years ago, has executed 200 grand projects in addition to hundreds of small ventures, despite recurring security obstacles. Al-Sharqawi said the occupation authorities' plots to alter the city identity are doomed to failure "because Jerusalem has always been a center for the human race civilization."

While expressing confidence that its residents would continue to stand firm against Zionist conspiracies, he voiced concern at the current social and economic conditions: such a worrying situation that warrants Arab, Islamic and international action to back the sectors undermined by Tel Aviv's settlement policies. Noting the necessity of sustainable funding for Jerusalem and its Palestinian populace, he underscored Kuwait's contributions to the social ventures in Jerusalem including those executed by the agency.

Shedding light on some of the Jerusalem



population needs, he said that they include construction of 20,000 residential units, 28 schools and 20 nurseries, in addition to medical equipment, cultural centers, stadiums, renovation of mosques and buildings

particularly heritage sites. He affirmed the agency's continuous need for donations and financial contributions in order to be able to proceed with its relief activities in Jerusalem. — KUNA



# Cabinet to present election draft law to National Assembly

## Kuwait government to propose establishing electoral commission

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet is set to present to the parliament Sunday a draft law on National Assembly elections and establishing a higher commission for elections, the Center for Government Communication announced on Saturday.

It's not clear what the draft law on elections will include, but setting up a higher commission for elections has long been a topic of debate in Kuwait, with many repeatedly question National Assembly election results in the absence of an independent body tasked with handling the process. Most recently, nine appeals have been lodged against the recent parliamentary elections, with some calling for recounting ballots.

### Preserving election integrity

Currently, the interior ministry oversees all aspects of the election process, with civil society organizations approved by the Cabinet monitoring the voting process and reporting possible violations to achieve transparency.

If approved, the commission would

be responsible for supervising parliamentary elections and organizing electoral campaigns in coordination with governmental and non-governmental bodies concerned with elections. The role of the interior ministry under the new draft law is not currently known, but it appears that the commission will be affiliated with the National Assembly and managed by a board of trustees.

This is not the first time that the commission has been on the Kuwaiti government's agenda. In 2012, a decree was issued to establish a "Supreme National Elections Commission" only to be invalidated soon after that by the constitutional court.

Activists and constitutional experts have also told the media over the years that having the commission as a supreme body to preserve the integrity of the electoral process is of great importance. In recent interviews with a local newspaper, constitutional experts stressed the importance of having an integrated constitutional and legal decree that contributes to en-

hancing the integrity and transparency of the elections.

An official with Al-Nazaha Society, a non-for-profit heavily involved with supervising the election process, said they are looking forward to the founding of a body which achieves "maximum transparency", especially in light of the recent annulments, dissolutions and subsequent reinstatements of parliamentary sessions. A commission would, for example, keep a close eye on candidate campaigns, ensuring they adhere to regulations as is the case in many developed countries around the world, one expert told a local newspaper in 2020.

Many parliamentarians have historically rallied behind the concept of an electoral commission. Earlier this year, 28 members of parliament submitted a request to the Speaker of the National Assembly to approve the law of the High Electoral Commission to ensure the transparency of the electoral process.

"It is no secret that the past elections were marred by unprecedented suspi-



cions, doubts and serious mistakes that compromised their integrity and prevented the real will of the voters to be shown in its true form, which requires an investigation to ensure the integrity

and transparency of the electoral process, and the completion of the issuance of the necessary legislation, most notably the law of the High Electoral Commission," they said.

## KFF controls fire at Amghara warehouse

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Fire Force announced on Saturday that five of its teams controlled a fire at Amghara scrapyard without any human casualties, with only material losses. "A report was received on Friday evening at the central operations department stating that a warehouse was on fire at Amghara scrapyard. The department immediately directed five fire bri-

gades to the site of the incident," KFF's public relations and media department said.

"Upon the arrival of the teams, it was found the fire had started in the warehouse that contained flammable goods, oils, wood and building materials spread over an area of approximately 2,000 square meters. The fire was dealt with, contained and controlled and did not spread to neighboring shops and stores," it added.

KFF called on owners of factories, warehouses, industrial plots and commercial buildings to apply safety and fire prevention requirements as well as remove obstacles from external corridors so that fire brigades can access, fight and control fires easily. —KUNA



## Move to cut expats, hire more Kuwaitis at co-op societies

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Social Affairs is discussing a number of proposals aimed at attracting Kuwaitis to work in the cooperative sector and regulating expatriate labor, including a proposal to lay off those who have spent 18 years in their jobs and not allow them to work in other cooperative societies. The move coincides with the start of the ministry's implementation of Kuwaitizing supervisory positions at cooperative societies and determining the salaries of Kuwaitis desiring to work in this sector.

Since cooperative societies constitute the largest retail market and biggest employers in the country, the supreme committee for addressing demographics considers it an important area to regulate the number of workers to reduce expatriate labor. "Among the proposals aimed at reducing excess expat labor in cooperative societies is to oblige cooperatives to reduce the high salaries of some employees who have received raises and dispense with those who have spent 18 years in their job and not allow them to work in other co-ops, which will contribute to the Kuwaitization of the cooperative sector," sources said.

The sources indicated the proposals include scrutinizing expatriates' work permits, contracts and job titles, as well as conformity with the job ti-

tle and salary. "The proposals also called for holding accountable any cooperative society that does not implement ministerial decisions on Kuwaitization or does it in a fictitious manner, as well as the formation of a team to detect and verify employment at cooperative societies," they said.

Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Sari announced that starting Sunday, vacant supervisory positions in a number of cooperative societies will be available for application through the Fakharna platform on the official website of the Public Authority of Manpower. "The process of introducing job opportunities will be carried out by a number of ministry employees who have been trained to do so in coordination with concerned cooperatives and according to the vacancies they have," Sari said.

He added PAM will receive and register applicants for these jobs within a certain period, then sort the files that meet the requirements for filling the jobs. The completed files will be presented to the competent committee headed by the director of the cooperative control and inspection department, representatives of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies and the cooperatives that placed the ads to conduct personal interviews of applicants.

"On February 14, a joint working group was formed between the three parties, and the team held many meetings to study the situation and vacancies and develop the necessary procedures for the implementation of the Kuwaitization project. One of the most important procedures emanating from those meetings was the issuance of the necessary ministerial decisions to determine

expression," the statement said.

"Kuwaiti Writers Association condemns the statements of some MPs who submitted the proposal that the censorship law did not serve the people, infringed on their dignity and defamed them, and is an experiment that has proven ineffective. These are irresponsible statements that try in vain to distort the law. They are not based on facts and

are far from reform," the statement said. It pointed out the move is not in the interest of cultural affairs, but rather delays its development and deviates it from the right track.

"The post-distribution censorship law has provided successful experiences by all standards that serve our aspirations towards being a state of freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and for Kuwait

to become a beacon of Arab culture once again," it added. The Kuwaiti Writers Association called on all concerned officials at the ministry of information, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters and members of the National Assembly to confront all attempts that aim to restricting freedoms and are based on distorting and harming Kuwait's cultural affairs.



BEIRUT: PAY's delegation are seen during their participation in the Arab forum for economic and social empowerment. — KUNA

## Youth authority promotes Arab partnerships

**BEIRUT:** Kuwait's Public Authority for Youth (PAY) is eager to strengthen bonds of partnership and ties among Arab youth to face common challenges through participating in Arab events and activities, said a PAY media official on Friday. The remark was made to KUNA by Jassem Al-Baghli, the head of the PAY's delegation partaking in the Arab forum for economic and social empowerment, co-organized by the Lebanese Ministry of Youth and Sports and the UNICEF. Baghli add-

ed that the delegation included head of Kuwaiti Youth Council's international relations committee Abdul Rahman Al-Saeedi and MP Hessa Al-Nuwaif. He noted that they held several meetings with the delegations participating in the forum, with the aim of strengthening partnership and boosting cooperation between Kuwaiti youth and their Arab peers. The forum is an opportunity to present youth initiatives and highlight their role in community development, he elaborated. Saeedi pointed out that the sessions of the forum discussed several topics like unemployment and the needs of the Arab labor market. In addition, the sessions covered issues that concern youth, such as privatization, available opportunities, entrepreneurship, the role of civil society organizations in youth development and digital transformation, he stated. The forum featuring dozens of Arab youth, including Kuwaitis, kicked off Thursday in Lebanon. — KUNA

## Medical association calls for electronic sick leave system

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Medical Association called on the Civil Service Council to support the proposal of the Ministry of Health to allow the granting of sick leaves "electronically", as is the case in many developed and neighboring countries.

"Sick leaves have become a heavy burden on the doctor and the health system," they said, stressing that citizens have the right to get a sick leave note without having to go to the clinic to receive one. The statement comes after reports of a patient assaulting a doctor at Jaber Al-Ahmad Center after refusing to give them a sick leave note for a person without their presence.

"90 percent of assault cases on doctors in health centers are due to illegal sick leave requests and 25 percent of visitors to these clinics are seeking to get a sick leave," the association said in a statement. The association stressed that granting medical services "electronically" will reduce the burden on the health system in primary care and stop wasting the resources of the Ministry of Health.

## Kuwait Writers Association slams censorship move

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Writers Association announced on Saturday that it is following reports that some MPs

have submitted a proposal on reviving pre-distribution censorship of publications and books imported from abroad. "The law was amended by the National Assembly years ago, which decided that censorship will be after distribution, with efforts made by a large group of authors, writers and publishers to achieve the goal of correcting the course in cultural affairs for more freedom of



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## Ons Jabeur made Arabs proud: Dr Souad Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: Tunisian tennis player Ons Jabeur is a pride for Tunisia and all Arabs, as she has not only succeeded in attracting and uniting Arab fans to support her since the beginning of the Wimbledon Open tennis tournament, Dr Souad Al-Sabah said in a statement.

She added that Jabeur also imposed her strong presence and made her participation in the tournament a national event. "The player made a historic achievement in the world of Tennis, after becoming the first Arab and African player to reach the final. With her courageous spirit that she possesses and her determination, she became a role model for Arab woman in general and the African woman in particular," she said.



Dr Souad Al-Sabah said in a message addressed to the Tunisian Jabeur: "I held my breath with you, and shared with you every heartbeat, as well as every blow to your determination and every sad tear you shed — but they are tears of ambition, not tears of brokenness. Beautiful things are to come for our daughter, whom we love and call the 'Minister of Happiness'."

Ons Jabeur qualified for the final round for the second year in a row after losing the title of the last edition of Wimbledon to Kazakh champion Elena Rybakina in two sets to one.

In her first comments after losing the Wimbledon final, Jabeur wiped her tears, saying: "This is the most painful loss of my career. It's going to be a tough day but I'm not going to give up and I'm coming back stronger. It's a tough journey but I promise to come back and I'll win this tournament one day."

### Photo of the day



KUWAIT: The photo shows very little traffic on a usually busy street overlooking the Arabian Gulf. The summer season is at its height in Kuwait, with many people travelling abroad or spending time at chalets in the south of the country, leaving many vital streets unusually nearly empty. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Summer heat amplifies disease risk during travel

## Doctor shares tips to steer clear from viruses, food-borne illness

KUWAIT: As Kuwait sees an uptick of travel with the summer season in full force, a doctor is urging travelers to follow recommended food safety guidelines to avoid catching a food-borne illness while abroad.

Consultant of internal medicine and infectious diseases at Al-Adan Hospital Dr Ghanim Al-Juhailan said high temperatures facilitate the growth of harmful bacteria that could lead to food poisoning if contaminated food is ingested. He said symptoms of food poisoning show almost immediately after consuming contaminated food.

He advised people to avoid leaving food at room temperature for long periods of time, double check the expiry dates of canned food and ensure the food preparation and storage areas are always clean.

### Summer diseases

Dr Al-Juhailan said viral infections are some of the most common causes for disease during the summer months. These include the influenza viruses and other respiratory viruses such as adenovirus that affect respiratory system and cause bronchitis, bronchiolitis, and pneumonia, he said.

Viral and bacterial infections transmitted through eating contaminated foods are also common. In some of these diseases, such as gastrointestinal infections causing vomiting or diarrhea, symptoms are quick to show. Other diseases, such as hepatitis A infection, symptoms are not instantly noticeable and could present from two to six weeks after returning home. Dr Al-Juhailan said travelers to areas where the disease is common, such as Africa, and South and Central America, should continue looking out for its symptoms even after returning home, including lethargy, nausea, and yellowing skin.

Dengue fever is another common travel-related disease. The virus causing the disease is not food-borne but can be transmitted to humans through mosquito bites. Dengue fever causes se-



Dr Ghanim Al-Juhailan

vere headaches, fever, and severe joint pain, in addition to a rash, which might appear with bright red skin. Destinations where people most often catch the disease include Costa Rica, Seychelles, and Singapore, said the doctor.

Another disease highlighted by Dr Al-Juhailan was dysentery, which causes severe and frequent bouts of diarrhea, feeling exhausted, fatigue, and belching accompanied by an unpleasant odor. The disease is caused by an intestinal bacterium common in Africa, Turkey and in eastern European countries and is transmitted mostly through drinking water, contaminated ice cubes, food or even by swimming in lakes or rivers. — KUNA



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HATAY: Kuwaiti health care professionals conducted 14 surgeries and helped other patients in efforts to provide medical aid in southern Turkey. — KUNA photos



## Kuwaiti team helps patients in Turkey

ANKARA: The Kuwaiti medical team "shifaa" has conducted in the second day of its mission in southern Turkey with 14 surgeries for people wounded in the Turkey-Syria quakes and the Syrian war. The team had first commenced its charitable work in

Turkey with support from the Kuwait Zakat House last February.

Dr Amer Shuaib, a specialist in foot surgery and bones at the Royal Hospital in Manchester, told KUNA on Friday that the surgeries mainly tackled fractures. He thanked Kuwait Alms House for bearing costs of the surgeries. The Kuwaiti team has a seven-year experience of medical aid in southern Turkey. The doctors and surgeons have conducted more than 330 operations and treated 8,200 patients. — KUNA





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## Kyiv drone hits Crimea munitions depot

Attacks escalate sparking evacuations and rail traffic chaos



A picture shows detonation of ammunition caused by a fire at a military training field in the Kirovsky district of Crimea. — AFP

**MOSCOW:** A Ukrainian drone attack on Crimea Saturday blew up an ammunition depot, sparking evacuations on the Moscow-annexed peninsula and halting rail traffic, just five days after drones damaged Russia's symbolic bridge across the Kerch Strait.

Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, has been targeted by Kyiv throughout Moscow's 17-month long Ukraine offensive but has come under more intense, increased attacks in recent weeks. In a counteroffensive launched to retake lands lost to Moscow, Kyiv has increasingly made clear—despite some Western unease—that it aims to also take back the Black Sea peninsula.

"The goal is to return Crimea," Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said, according to a transcript published by his office Saturday of a speech addressing the Aspen Security Forum Friday. He said Kyiv considers the Crimea bridge—opened by Russian leader Vladimir Putin in 2018 -- as an "enemy object" and wants it to be "neutralized". Less than 24 hours later, the Moscow-installed head of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said an "enemy" drone had detonated an ammunition depot.

"As a result of an attack by an enemy drone on the Krasnogvardeysky district, an ammunition depot detonated," Aksyonov said on Telegram, referring to an area that lies inland at the centre of Crimea. He ordered the evacuation of people living within five kilometers of the zone. Aksyonov reported no

casualties and claimed there was little damage, but unverified videos on social media showed billowing smoke rising into the air.

He also said rail traffic will be stopped on the peninsula: "To minimize risks, it was also decided to halt rail traffic on Crimean railways." Road traffic across the Crimea bridge—one of the few ways to get out of Crimea as flights have been cancelled during the conflict—only resumed Saturday after a Ukrainian attack damaged the bridge Tuesday, killing two people.

The attacks came a day before Putin was due to meet his closest ally—Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko—for the first time since the latter helped end a dramatic mutiny by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group. The pair is due to meet in Putin's home city of Saint Petersburg.

### Black Sea escalation

The attacks on Crimea have come as many of Kyiv's Western allies feel uncomfortable about Ukrainian ambitions to take back the annexed land, fearing a larger-scale conflict with Russia. They have also signified a sharp escalation in the Black Sea area. Ukraine has said it was looking for ways to continue a grain corridor in the Black Sea, suggesting a patrol by border countries in the area. Zelensky said he discussed the "unblocking" of the corridor with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg on Saturday. The pair had spoken about "future steps

necessary for unblocking and (the) sustainable operation of the Black Sea grain corridor," he said, without giving further details. In his speech Friday, Zelensky warned that Moscow "believes that the Black Sea is purely Russian."

Kyiv has called on the United Nations and neighboring countries to secure safe passage for cargoes through joint patrols. The Russian army on Friday carried out live-fire exercises in the Black Sea, with the UN warning against escalation.

On the battlefield, Moscow's forces said Saturday that they had pushed back three Ukrainian attacks in the eastern villages of Urozhayniy and Priyutniy. Ukraine said Russia shelled Kupyansk—in the north-east Kharkiv region where Russia has gone on a limited offensive this week—Saturday, killing a 57-year-old woman.

### Cluster munitions

Russia also alleged that Kyiv had used notorious cluster munitions on the Russian border village of Zhuravlevka and that the controversial weapon had killed one of its journalists in a front-line village. The allegations came two weeks after US President Joe Biden faced fierce criticism from his own allies for sending the munitions, that carry a long-term risk to civilians.

The Russian army announced that Rostislav Zhuravlev, a war correspondent working for the state RIA Novosti news agency, died from his

wounds after coming under fire from cluster munitions in occupied southern Ukraine.

Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov, meanwhile, said "three cluster munitions from a multiple rocket launcher were fired (by the Ukrainian army) at the village of Zhuravlevka" on Friday.

The region has seen near daily cross-border attacks for months. It was the first time Russia reported the weapons were used on its territory. Putin has said Moscow had enough cluster munition to answer if Ukraine was to use the weapons.

### Poland summons Russian ambassador

EU member Poland, which borders both Russia and Ukraine, issued an "urgent" summons to the Russian ambassador on Saturday, a day after Putin claimed that Western Poland was a "gift" from Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. "Our friends in Warsaw have forgotten? We will remind them," Putin said during a government meeting. Putin said Poland "dreams of Belarusian land," a claim often repeated by Moscow. Poland called the comments "provocative" and said it was an attempt to whitewash Putin's role in Ukraine. Warsaw and Kyiv have expressed worries about Belarus hosting Wagner fighters on its territory after Minsk said the force will train its army. Relations between Poland and Russia have been historically difficult and have dipped to new lows since Moscow's Ukraine offensive. Warsaw's summons came a day before Putin and Lukashenko will meet Sunday. — AFP

## US-Australia war games focus on long-range strikes

**SHOALWATER BAY, Australia:** Australia and the United States rehearsed precision missile strikes during war games on Saturday as Canberra overhauls its military strategy in favor of long-range firepower.

A series of live-fire drills were held at the Shoalwater Bay military complex in the northeastern region of Queensland, showcasing the American-made HIMARS missile system recently sold to the Australian Defense Force. More than 30,000 troops will take part in the biennial Talisman Sabre exercises over the next two weeks, including soldiers from Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea.

The drills come as Australia embarks upon a major overhaul of its armed forces,

pivoting towards long-range strike capabilities in an effort to keep would-be foes such as China at arm's length. Australian Army Major Tony Purdy said the HIMARS weapon—used to devastating effect by the Ukrainian military—would "provide a significant capability boost" and much-needed "long-range precision".

HIMARS—or the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System—was developed for the United States Army by Lockheed Martin in the 1990s. Defence bosses have praised its coveted "shoot and scoot ability"—it can be placed, fired, moved and reloaded quickly, making it more difficult for the enemy to find and target, lessening the risk to crew.

Australia's first HIMARS are due in 2025 and are expected to come into use over the following two years. Beijing has been keeping a close eye on the drills, which come amid increasing unease about China's growing military muscle in the Asia-Pacific.

A Chinese spy ship had been spotted off

Australia's northeastern coast as preparations were underway. Lieutenant General Greg Bilton, Australia's chief of joint operations, told reporters on Friday. The Talisman Sabre exercise will also see troops performing amphibious landings, air combat and maritime operations across several Australian states and territories.

Major Jimmy Sheehan, Talisman Sabre spokesperson for the US forces, said the exercise showed "increased complexity, scope, and partner nation participation".

"Language barriers aside, it's challenging to synchronise long-range fires from both air and land," he told AFP. "But today we saw service members from Australia, the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea successfully operate as a single unit from command and control to execution at the tactical level." Speaking of the remainder of the exercise, he added: "These initiatives and 'firsts' ultimately create an exercise that will enhance Australia and the US's ability to respond to global security challenges in the region." —AFP

## Biden gives CIA chief Burns a cabinet seat

**WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden announced Friday that he has invited CIA Director William Burns to sit on the cabinet, a mostly symbolic elevation that recognized the US spymaster's broader role in the administration.

Biden praised Burns for providing him "clear, straightforward analysis that prioritizes the safety and security of the American people." "Under his leadership, the CIA is delivering a clear-eyed, long-term approach to our nation's top national security

challenges—from tackling Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine, to managing responsible competition with the People's Republic of China, to addressing the opportunities and risks of emerging technology," Biden said.

Biden's action means Burns will serve on the cabinet side-by-side with his immediate senior, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, as well as all the department secretaries. Before the Director of National Intelligence was established in 2005, CIA directors served on presidential cabinets. During the 2017-2021 presidency of Donald Trump, both of his CIA chiefs, Mike Pompeo and Gina Haspel, were also included in the cabinet.

A career diplomat who was ambassador to Russia, Burns, 67, took the helm at the Central Intelligence Agency in 2021.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he has taken a leading role in maintaining the deeply frayed relationship between Washington and Moscow. Several weeks before the invasion, he flew to Moscow to warn officials that the United States knew of its invasion plans and warned of the West's response. And last month, as the United States worried about the ramifications for global security of the Wagner private military group's short-lived rebellion against Moscow, Burns spoke at length with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Naryshkin, the SVR foreign intelligence chief.

Burns said in a statement that he was honored and that Biden's invitation "recognizes the essential contributions to national security the Central Intelligence Agency makes every day." Haines meanwhile said she was "absolutely delighted" at the move. —AFP

## CONDOLENCES

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on the sad demise of his father



**A C Thomas**

(17/8/1934 - 19/7/2023)

Condolences also extended  
to his wife **Litty Mathew**  
and brother **Cherian Thomas**

**May his soul Rest in Peace**



## International

# Ruling UK Conservatives suffer vote routs but avoid wipeout

## Voters respond to scandals during Johnson's tenure, high inflation

**LONDON:** Britain's ruling Conservatives on Friday held the former seat of ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson, but saw hefty majorities in two other constituencies evaporate as voters responded to scandals during his tenure and high inflation.

Rishi Sunak had been expected to become the first prime minister in decades to lose three parliamentary seats in one day. He was spared that humiliation thanks to a narrow victory in the northwest London seat of Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

That result, driven by opposition to Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's contentious expansion of a vehicle pollution tax to outer London, offered the embattled Tory leader some relief.

But the erasure of his party's 19,000 majority in the Somerton and Frome seat in southwest England, and its 20,000 majority in the Selby and Ainsty constituency in the northeast, represent bitter blows ahead of an expected general election in 2024. "By-elections midterm for an incumbent government are always difficult, they rarely win them," Sunak told reporters Friday morning, while visiting Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

"The message I take away is that we've got to double down, stick to our plan and deliver for people... and earn people's trust for the next election." But his Conservatives face defeat nationally next year if Thursday's results are repeated.

Labour took the seat of Selby and Ainsty by 16,456 votes to 12,295, in what its leader Keir Starmer said was the biggest-ever swing to the party in its history. "We hear that cry for change away from the chaos, away from those rising bills, the crumbling public services," he told supporters during a victory visit there on Friday.

## Kurdish exiles in limbo 10 months after Iran protests

**ARBIL, Iraq:** Like other Iranian Kurds who fled into exile during last year's women-led mass protests, 17-year-old Sarina tries to keep a low profile in her new home in northern Iraq. She avoids drawing attention in her waitress job and hides her face behind a COVID mask when she walks the streets of Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The teenager—who asked not to be fully identified citing security fears—was among the thousands who joined the wave of street protests sparked by the September death of Mahsa Amini. Anger flared after the 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian died in morality police custody after her arrest for allegedly flouting the strict Islamic dress code for women.

At the time, Sarina was visiting her mother in Mahabad, in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, and joined the protests. She then took to the streets again in her nearby hometown of Oshnavieh.

When a friend of hers was arrested, Sarina went into hiding. "At first, I said I wouldn't be returning home for two days," Sarina recalled. Then the authorities raided her home while she was away and detained her uncle. In mid-October, Sarina crossed the porous mountain border, a region long used by smugglers, from Iran's mainly Kurdish west into Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

### 'Stunning'

Ex-Tory MP Nigel Adams had prompted the vote when he quit after failing to be nominated for a peerage last month. In Somerton and Frome, the Liberal Democrats comfortably won with an even bigger shift from the Conservatives, the latest in a series of by-election wins in recent years.

The contest was held after its former Tory MP David Warburton stood down after admitting cocaine use. The Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election was triggered after the scandal-tarred Boris Johnson also resigned as a lawmaker last month. He quit after learning that a cross-party parliamentary committee had concluded he had deliberately lied to lawmakers about lockdown-breaking parties during the Covid pandemic, and recommended a 90-day suspension. Sunak's Tories had been expected to lose his seat, but won by less than 500 votes, delivering a blow to Starmer and Khan.

Winning candidate Steve Tuckwell said the "number one" issue had been the mayor's expansion of the tax on polluting vehicles. Labour MPs in similar seats "will now be panicking", he said.

Election experts were skeptical, however. "It would seem unwise for Tory MPs to draw any conclusion other than that their party is still in deep electoral trouble," Strathclyde University's John Curtice wrote in an analysis for the BBC.

### Sunak struggles

The heavy defeats in the other two contests leave Sunak increasingly vulnerable, with parliament's six-week summer break starting Friday providing welcome relief. Labour is currently enjoying double-digit poll leads and is poised to retake power for the first time in over a decade. Sunak became prime



**RUISLIP, UK:** Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (center left) sits with newly elected Conservative MP Steve Tuckwell (center right) at a cafe in Ruislip on July 21, 2023 after a by-election in the northwest London constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip. — AFP

minister following the disastrous 44-day tenure of predecessor Liz Truss and initially succeeded in stabilizing financial markets panicked by her radical tax-slashing agenda.

But the 43-year-old former finance minister has struggled to reverse his party's declining fortunes, which first set in during the so-called "Partygate"

scandal under Johnson. Sunak's turnaround efforts have in part been hobbled by persistently high inflation, which in recent months has spooked the markets once again. With interest rates at their highest in 15 years, pushing mortgage and other borrowing costs ever higher, the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation is showing few signs of abating. — AFP



**ARBIL:** An Iraqi Kurdish woman works at the kitchen of a sweets shop named after Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish-Iranian woman who died in Iranian police custody after her arrest in 2022, in Arbil, the capital of Iraq's northern autonomous Kurdish region, on June 22, 2023. — AFP

She now spends her mornings serving tea at a corporate office and her evenings working as a waitress, making ends meet on \$800 a month. "My family is forced to accept that I am here," she said. "It is very difficult for them. They are worried about me."

Sarina said she has no plans to move further away, explaining that "I don't like being too far from my country. I want to be able to go back to my family quickly if something happens."

Iran's protests under the motto "woman, life, freedom" sparked a state crackdown during which hundreds were killed, mostly protesters but also dozens of security personnel. Thousands were arrested in what authorities labeled "riots" and blamed on foreign enemies. Seven men were executed for protest-related violence against security forces. — AFP

## Russia arrests Kremlin critic for 'extremism'

**MOSCOW:** Former separatist commander and nationalist military blogger Igor Girkin, a frequent critic of Russia's leadership, was arrested on Friday and remanded in custody awaiting trial on charges of extremism.

Girkin—better known by his alias Igor Strelkov—is a supporter of the Ukraine offensive but also regularly criticized its conduct on the messaging app Telegram, where he was followed by around 875,000 people. By opening a case against him, observers said authorities were sending a signal that any criticism—even from supporters of the military operation in Ukraine—are off-limits in the aftermath of the Wagner mercenary group's short-lived rebellion.

A Moscow court ordered Girkin to be placed in detention pending trial on charges of "public calls for extremism" that could land him in prison for five years. "Justice in our country, once again, has not triumphed" his lawyer Alexander Molokhov told reporters outside the Meshchansky Court in Moscow.

Molokhov said the defence would appeal the court's decision and explained the case against his client was based on two social media posts in which Girkin discussed Russian-annexed Crimea and army supplies. Several dozen supporters gathered around the court, with at least one detained.

"The repressive machine has gone into full gear, this is an excuse to knock him out from public work," said



**MOSCOW:** Igor Girkin (Strelkov) sits inside a glass defendants' cage during a hearing to consider a request on his pre-trial arrest in Moscow on July 21, 2023. — AFP

Pavel Gubarev, head of the "Club of Angry Patriots" that Girkin co-founded.

Shortly before being detained, Gubarev said Girkin's supporters would fight using all legal means. "Igor Ivanovich Strelkov isn't just not an extremist: he is a patriot who has gone through five wars in the interests of Russia." A former FSB colonel, Girkin was one of the key figures in the pro-Kremlin insurgency when fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Girkin ruled the then-rebel stronghold of Sloviansk with an iron fist, with executions for petty theft reportedly carried out under his rule. But he was squeezed out of the separatist leadership later that year under mysterious circumstances and returned to Russia, where he lost all influence, until the offensive began. In 2022, he was one of three men sentenced by a Dutch court to life imprisonment over the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014. — AFP

## July set to be hottest ever...

### Continued from Page 1

The effects cannot be attributed solely to the El Nino weather pattern, which "has really only just emerged" and isn't expected to strengthen until later in the year.

El Nino is associated with the warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. Schmidt said the trend of extreme heat was expected to persist, "and the reason why we think that's going to continue, is because we continue to put greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere". Greece, which is battling dozens of forest fires, warned people not to venture out unnecessarily due to the baking heat.

Firefighters were still battling 79 forest fires across the country. Their spokesman Vassilios Vathrakoyannis said Greece would be on a state of alert through the weekend. Fires on the island of Rhodes forced dozens to evacuate their homes late Friday, officials said, as Slovak firefighters arrived to provide reinforcement. A hotel in the Kiotari area of the island that was bustling with tourists was also forced to evacuate as a precautionary measure, requiring 30 buses to relocate the holiday-goers to a safer area.

The exceptional temperatures also mean key tourist sites such as the Acropolis will be closed during the hottest part of the day, with authorities saying the last entries for tourists will be at 11:30 am (0800 GMT) on Sunday. "This weekend risks being the hottest registered in July in the past 50 years," said Panagiotis Giannopoulos, meteorologist with state broadcaster ERT.

Sea temperatures are two to three degrees above normal, the state weather service reported Saturday, while a high of 42.6C recorded by the Akrotiri weather station on Friday, which is expected to be topped. Sunday is likely to see the city labor under temperatures as high as 44C, with the central region of Thessalia enduring 45C.

The temperatures are taking a toll on people's health. A 46-year-old man was reported to have succumbed to heatstroke on the central Greek island of Evia after being admitted to Chalkida hospital, which said cardio-respiratory failure following exposure to high temperatures appeared to be the cause. Emergency health officials told the state broadcaster at least 38 heatstroke patients were received in the last three days, while hospitals were also seeing cases of fainting and other heat-related conditions. Greece is just one of a swathe of countries battling a prolonged spell of extreme heat around the globe in recent days. — Agencies

## Iraqis protest after Denmark...

### Continued from Page 1

"Our staff on the premises at the time were physically unharmed, but there has been damage to the property with structures set on fire."

Sadr, who has a following of millions among the country's majority Shiite population and wields great influence over national politics, has urged action. His followers on Saturday reacted to the news from Copenhagen, and gathered in the predawn darkness at Tahrir Square in central Baghdad, some carrying portraits of Sadr. "Yes, yes to the Quran!" shouted the protesters, mostly young men.

Security forces cut two bridges leading to the high-security Green Zone where governmental institutions and foreign embassies are located. The demonstrators tried to force their way through but dispersed several hours later, following scuffles, an interior ministry official told AFP, speaking anonymously because he was not allowed to brief the media. Another security source said officers used batons and tear gas to repel a small group of demonstrators who managed to break into the

Green Zone in an attempt to reach the Danish embassy.

Early Saturday, Iraq's foreign ministry had condemned "the desecration of the Holy Quran and the Iraqi flag" in front of the embassy in Denmark. The ministry's statement said that "these actions provoke reactions and put all the parties in delicate situations". It reaffirmed Baghdad's "full commitment" to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and said it guarantees "the protection and security provided to diplomatic teams". Iraqi President Abdel Latif Rashid called on Western governments to put a stop to the "provocations".

Neighboring Iran called in Danish ambassador Jasper Vahr to protest, the foreign ministry said. "Book burning in Europe is a reminder of the dark atmosphere of the era of ignorance and the Middle Ages, which is the biggest threat to the freedom of thought in the West," its Western Europe director general Majid Nili Ahmadabadi said.

Following the Copenhagen incident, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said: "The Danish government is responsible for preventing insults to the Holy Quran and Islamic sanctities, as well as prosecuting and punishing those who insult them." The Danish foreign ministry said it "condemns the burning of the Quran", "Burning of holy texts and other religious symbols is a shameful act that disrespects the religion of others," it said in a statement. — AFP

## Women torch houses after...

### Continued from Page 1

India is generally traditionalist, conservative and patriarchal, but the Meitei have a history of women's activism, with women having a more prominent role in society than elsewhere. The video of the naked women sparked protests across India on Friday, with demonstrators calling for the state's chief minister to step down over the delay in taking action.

"Can normal people do these things?... Even cats, dogs, animal (s) never committed these kind of filthy act," said one demonstrator near Imphal, where hundreds of women gathered to protest. "This is not even how human beings treat other human," she said. D Y Chandrachud, chief justice of India's Supreme Court, said the abuse of the women seen in the video was "simply unacceptable". Legal news site Bar and Bench quoted Chandrachud as saying that if the government "does not act, we will".

Authorities in Manipur, led by the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said police had taken action as soon as the video surfaced on social media. A "thorough investigation" was under way, the state's chief minister N Biren Singh tweeted Thursday. "We will ensure strict action is taken against all the perpetrators, including considering the possibility of capital punishment," he added.

The Manipur violence came after the Kuki community protested Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action, stoking long-held fears that they might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups.

Homes and churches were torched, with tens of thousands of people fleeing to government-run camps. In a detailed report to the Supreme Court in June, civil society group Manipur Tribal Forum said many gruesome acts of violence, including rape and beheading, had not been investigated by state authorities. Footage of one such incident was shared on Twitter on Thursday, reportedly showing an aide to a BJP lawmaker in the state holding a victim's severed head, before it disappeared from the platform within hours. — AFP

## Sweaty robot to show impact...

### Continued from Page 1

and none of them could venture outdoors. They were mainly used by sports equipment manufacturers to test their technical clothing in thermal chambers.

Researchers hope the robot will provide a better understanding of hyperthermia — that is, when a body overheats, a condition that is threatening a growing proportion of the world's population as a result of global warming. For obvious ethical reasons, "nobody measures core temperature increase while somebody's getting heatstroke," says Rykaczewski. But the effects of heat on the human body are still not fully comprehended. ANDI gives researchers a chance to understand.

Accompanied by MaRTy (Mean Radiant Temperature), a mobile weather station that measures the heat reflected by the buildings around it, the robot is taking its first steps outside in Phoenix — an ideal laboratory in which to prepare for tomorrow's climate. "How do we

change what we wear? How do we change our behavioral patterns, and adjust them to temperatures that are of this order of magnitude?" says Rykaczewski.

Andi is also infinitely reprogrammable. The research team can make "digital twins of the mannequin to look at different segments of the population," explains Jennifer Vanos, a climatologist involved in the project. For example, the older you get, the less you sweat. Young people will need different protection from athletes or people in poor health. With ANDI, scientists can simulate the thermoregulatory mechanisms specific to each individual.

They can also test the robot in a variety of situations. For example, Phoenix is dry — what about humid heat? How does the human body cope in hot winds? Their research will be useful for designing heat-resistant clothing, rethinking urban planning and protecting the most vulnerable. In Phoenix, which opens dozens of cooling centers for the homeless every summer, their findings could guide the actions of social workers. "How long should a person stay in a cooling center to cool off, so that their core temperature goes down to a level that's safe again? We can answer that question with Andi," says Vanos. — AFP



## International

# North Korea fires 'several cruise missiles' into sea

## Concern grows over whereabouts and wellbeing of US soldier

SEOUL: North Korea fired "several cruise missiles" into the Yellow Sea between China and the Korean peninsula on Saturday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Pyongyang's latest provocation comes as concern grows over the whereabouts and wellbeing of a US soldier who made an unauthorized dash into North Korean territory earlier this week, with the reclusive regime so far remaining tight-lipped about the incident.

Saturday's launches are just the latest in a series by Pyongyang, and come as Seoul and Washington ramp up defense cooperation, with relations between the two Koreas nearing an all-time low.

The cruise missile launches took place around 4 am (1900 GMT) on Saturday, Seoul's military said.

"South Korean and US intelligence authorities were analyzing the launches while monitoring signs of additional activities," the JCS said. North Korea had fired two ballistic missiles into the sea off its opposite coast toward Japan just three days earlier.

Diplomacy between Pyongyang and Seoul has stalled, and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called for ramping up weapons development, including tactical nukes. In response, Seoul and Washington have staged joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and US strategic assets, while an American nuclear-armed submarine this week made a South Korean port call for the first time in decades.

### 'End of the regime'

On his visit to the submarine on Wednesday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol warned Pyongyang it would face the "end of the regime" if it attacked the South with nuclear weapons. "I feel assured having seen the US' most important nuclear strategic asset here," he said. On Thursday, North Korean defence minister Kang Sun Nam said the Ohio-class submarine's deployment might have fallen "under the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons specified in the DPRK law on the nuclear force policy", using an acronym for the North's official name.

North Korea last year adopted a sweeping nuclear law setting out an array of scenarios in which it



SEOUL: People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on July 22, 2023. — AFP

could use its nukes, including pre-emptive strikes if threatened. A day later, South Korea's defense ministry reiterated that any use of nuclear weapons by the North would prompt an "immediate and decisive response" resulting in the Kim regime's demise.

Saturday's launches came just days after US soldier Travis King was believed to have been taken into North Korean custody after he broke away from a tour group visiting the Demilitarized Zone.

The United States has said it is "very concerned" about Private Second Class King's treatment, and as of Saturday, Pyongyang had yet to respond to inquiries about the soldier. King had been due to return to the United States to face military discipline after serving jail time in South Korea for assault. Instead he left the airport before he was set to depart, joined a tour of the border and fled across it.

### Sanctions 'concerns'

Meanwhile, the Group of Seven nations, the European Union and three other countries have urged

China to expel oil tankers from its waters that appear to be taking fuel to North Korea in defiance of UN sanctions, according to a letter seen by AFP on Friday. "We have concerns regarding the continuing presence of multiple oil tankers... that use your territorial waters in Sansha Bay as refuge to facilitate their trade of sanctioned petroleum products to the DPRK," read the letter, which was signed by the countries' ambassadors and addressed to China's UN envoy Zhang Jun.

In the letter, the ambassadors told Zhang they "would like to provide your government with additional information and satellite imagery" supporting the allegations, while calling on China to deny the vessels "all services, and ultimately expel them from your waters". A source said the letter had been sent to the Chinese envoy, though there was no confirmation it had been received. North Korea has been subject to UN sanctions since 2006 over its missile launches and nuclear programs, with additional sanctions in 2017 limiting its crude oil imports. — AFP

## Monkey business in Pakistan court during smuggling case

KARACHI: A baby monkey caused chaos in a Pakistan court after escaping from a troop presented as evidence in a case of wildlife smuggling, officials said. Two men were intercepted outside Karachi Thursday trying to smuggle 14 baby monkeys in crates usually used to transport mangos. But when they were brought to court on Friday, one of the monkeys escaped—causing chaos as staff tried to tempt it down from a tree.

"The monkeys were kept in the boxes in a bad condition... they could hardly breathe," said Javed Mahar, chief of Sindh Wildlife Department. The trade or keeping of wild animals is illegal in Pakistan, but laws are routinely ignored and there is a lively market in exotic pets.

Monkeys are frequently kept by street entertainers to attract customers, and in some cases have been trained by criminals to enter houses to steal. The smugglers were each fined 100,000 rupees (around \$350) on Friday and the court ordered the monkeys to be handed over to Karachi Zoo—a step immediately criticized by wildlife officials.

"The monkeys should have been returned to their natural habitat from where they were captured," Mahar said. Pakistan's zoos are notorious for their poor facilities and activists accuse them of disregarding animal welfare. In 2020, a court ordered the only zoo in the country's capital to close because of its decrepit state. — AFP



A caretaker holds a monkey at a zoo in Karachi on July 21, 2023, after being recovered from illegal traders. — AFP

## Cambodian workers prep and pray ahead of one-sided vote

PHNOM PENH: Incense drifted across a classroom as Cambodian election workers sought spiritual blessings for their makeshift polling station, ahead of a vote that leader Hun Sen needs no divine intervention to win.

Sunday's election has been widely condemned as a sham by international observers, with any real opposition eliminated, allowing Hun Sen to prepare to hand the reins to his son Hun Manet after four decades of iron-fisted rule. At the Hun Sen Bun Rany Wat Phnom High School on the eve of the poll, workers moved battered desks, set up voting booths, and unfolded large steel ballot boxes. In one room, red incense sticks protruded from a bunch of bananas,



NEW DELHI: Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe (left) shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi before a meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on July 21, 2023. — AFP

## India, Sri Lanka mulls land link

NEW DELHI: India and Sri Lanka agreed Friday to consider building a land link between them, they said during President Ranil Wickremesinghe's first visit to the regional powerhouse, as Chinese influence grows on his island.

Establishing "land connectivity" across the Palk Strait, which in places is only around 25 kilometres (15 miles) wide, would give India access to the key ports of Trincomalee and Colombo and strengthen a "millennia-old relationship", the neighbors said in a strategic document. Feasibility studies on a land bridge and a petroleum pipeline will be carried out, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after their talks. Wickremesinghe's two-day visit came a year after he became president following the toppling of his predecessor during an unprecedented economic crisis.

As Sri Lanka saw daily street protests over shortages of food, fuel and medicines, India poured in nearly \$4 billion in aid, despite Colombo defaulting on its \$46 billion in foreign debt.

"Sri Lanka faced many challenges last year but like a close friend we stood shoulder to shoulder with the people of Sri Lanka in the time of crisis," Modi said. In the discussions, New Delhi also raised concerns about the "Chinese presence" in Sri Lanka, said India's foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra.

smoldering on a desk. The smoke wafted through the classroom in central Phnom Penh, passing over portraits of Cambodia's royal family and an image of the historic ruins of Angkor Wat tacked to the walls. "We ask the spirits for a smooth election tomorrow and future happiness," Touch Nara told AFP as she sorted through candidate lists.

It certainly looks like a smooth ride for Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP), with the sole credible alternative, the Candlelight Party, barred from running. It means the CPP is voters' only real option, despite the presence of 17 small and poorly funded parties—their chances of scoring any of the 125 seats in the lower house are vanishingly small. The 70-year-old leader has made it clear he will step down and pass the baton to his son, 45-year-old Hun Manet—perhaps as soon as next month—though he has said he will still wield power from behind the scenes.

Web developer Seila Lyhour told AFP he was unsure about Hun Manet succeeding. "For me, I would say that he will change direction a little bit from his father. Even though they are related some people

have different opinions," he said. "We cannot say for sure if it will go the same way," said the 23-year-old, who had been selected as an election worker and was being paid 245,700 riel (\$59) for the day.

Outside the school, traffic sped past as many city residents returned to their home provinces for the poll. About 9.7 million people are registered to vote.

### 'You never forget'

"I will vote tomorrow," a 73-year-old Cambodian told AFP, as behind him workers prepared a polling station by the Mekong river. "I want the country to be developed like Western countries, but we have to go step by step," he cautioned. The father of four, who declined to give his name, said he had voted in every election since the end of the Khmer Rouge, who killed some 1.7 million before they were toppled by the Vietnamese and Hun Sen was installed as leader in the 1980s. "This is a very important point: It was so hard, we had nothing to eat, we could not speak and people died in front of us," he said. "When living in hardship, if someone gives you rice, you never forget." — AFP

### News in brief

#### Wang to visit five countries

BEIJING: China's top diplomat Wang Yi will visit South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Turkey in the coming days, Beijing's foreign ministry announced on Wednesday. "Wang Yi will attend the 13th BRICS high representatives' meeting on security affairs in Johannesburg from July 24 to 25, and visit Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Turkey before and after the meeting," the ministry said in a statement. South Africa is the current chair of the BRICS, a grouping of heavyweights that also includes Brazil, Russia, India and China to challenge the dominant US and European-led global governance structures. — AFP

#### Portugal gears for Pope's visit

LISBON: In preparing to welcome Pope Francis along with a million young people for World Youth Day, Portugal has reinstated random border security checks Saturday. The "exceptional" measure has been implemented "to prevent possible threats to public order and internal security", which will last until August 7, according to a government decision. Portugal is expecting about a million pilgrims from around the world, according to organizers, to attend the gathering of young Catholics from August 1 to 6. — AFP

#### Panama migrant numbers surge

PANAMA CITY: The number of migrants passing through Panama on the way to the United States keeps climbing, far outpacing the record numbers reached in 2022, a top authority said Friday. "Today we add 227,000 migrants who have passed through our territory, and this month we are going to exceed the history-making 2022, when there were 248,000 migrants," Security Minister Juan Manuel Pino told reporters. Migrant passages are tallied at a border checkpoint in the Darien Gap. — AFP

#### Indonesia market curbs meat trade

JAKARTA: A notorious Indonesian animal market has ended the sale of dog and cat meat after years of activist pressure to stop the trade and its brutal methods of slaughter, according to campaigners. Canine and feline meat were on the menu alongside bats, rats, snakes and monkeys at the Tomohon Extreme Market on Sulawesi island, known for its disturbing culinary spread until a ban was imposed on Friday. The previously uncompromising bazaar is the first such market in the country to finally back down and stop the trade of cat and dog meat, animal rights group Humane Society International (HSI) said in a statement Friday. — AFP

#### 16 electrocuted in India

DEHRADUN: At least 15 people died after being electrocuted while protesting the earlier death of another person by electric shock at a government river project in India, officials and reports said Thursday. At least 11 others were injured in the accident in the Chamoli district of the northern state of Uttarakhand. The caretaker of the project site died on Tuesday night, and his body was found by his family on Wednesday, sparking protests. When a crowd gathered, 15 others were then electrocuted, officials said. — AFP

## Hopes fade for Indian landslide victims; toll 22

RAIGAD: Hopes faded Friday for the survival of dozens missing after a landslide smashed into a village in India, as rescuers battled rains and difficult terrain. Heavy equipment cannot be brought to the hilly, forested site in Raigad district and emergency personnel scrambled at mounds of earth and rubble as families tried to hold back their tears.

Laxmi Kaluram Gavand broke down as she told of how her entire family had been wiped out. "All 10 members are gone. No one has survived from the family." So far 22 people have been confirmed dead since the landslide on Thursday, India's National Disaster Response Force said. The brother of Mangesh Bhagya Bohar, 50, was among dozens of people believed to be missing. "We are losing hope as the mud has engulfed entire houses, waist high. The rescue workers have still not removed the mud," he said. — AFP



Relatives of the people who lost their lives in a landslide weep in a house at Irshalwadi village in Raigad district of India's Maharashtra state. — AFP



## Business

SUNDAY, JULY 23, 2023

## Biden evokes AI's 'enormous' risks

Tech titans promise watermarks to expose AI creations



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (left) speaks about AI in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on July 21, 2023. Biden was meeting with (second left to right) Adam Selipsky, CEO of Amazon Web Services; Greg Brockman, President of OpenAI; Nick Clegg, President of Meta; Mustafa Suleyman, CEO of Inflection AI; and Dario Amodei, CEO of Anthropic. — AFP

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden evoked AI's "enormous" risk and promise Friday at a White House meeting with tech leaders who committed to guarding against everything from cyber-attacks to fraud as the sector revolutionizes society.

"It is astounding," Biden said, highlighting AI's "enormous, enormous promise of both risk to our society and our economy and our national security, but also incredible opportunities."

Standing alongside top representatives from Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Inflection, Meta, Microsoft and OpenAI, Biden said the cutting-edge companies had made commitments to "guide responsible innovation" as AI rips ever deeper into personal and business life.

"We'll see more technology change in the next 10 years or even in the next few years than we've seen in the last 50 years. That has been an astounding revelation to me," Biden said. "The group here will be critical in shepherding that innovation with

responsibility and safety." Ahead of the meeting, the seven AI giants committed to a series of self-regulated safeguards that the White House said would "underscore three principles that must be fundamental to the future of AI: safety, security and trust."

Although AI—in which computer programs learn to do many jobs currently performed by humans—is seen as a hugely empowering tool, it also poses potentially nightmarish risks. In their pledge, the companies agreed to develop "robust technical mechanisms," such as watermarking systems, to ensure users know when content is from AI and not human-generated. Worry that content created by artificial intelligence will be used for fraud and misinformation has ramped up as the technology improves and the 2024 presidential election gets closer.

Already, supporters of Republican candidate Ron DeSantis have gotten attention with an attack ad featuring an artificially generated voice like that of party frontrunner Donald Trump.

#### 'Enormous potential upside

The White House initiative demonstrates an early effort to get in front of the snowballing problem of how to regulate an industry developing faster than Congress may be able to handle. Among the measures pledged by the seven companies ahead of the Biden meeting is agreeing to independent "internal and external security testing of their AI systems before their release" for threats to biosecurity, cybersecurity and "broader societal effects." Officials said Biden is also already working on an executive order—something that has limited powers, but does not require congressional approval—on AI safety.

"We need to make sure we're pulling every lever of the federal government to regulate and take action—and work with... (Congress) on legislation," White House Chief of Staff Jeff Zients told Axios.

"We will need legislation to build the capacity to have the experts that we need in the federal govern-

ment, and then to have the regulatory authority to hold the private sector accountable—and to hardwire these actions so that they're enduring," Zients said. The White House said it is also working with foreign allies to seek "a strong international framework to govern the development and use of AI" around the world. The topic was prominent at the G7 in Japan this May, while Britain is set to hold an international AI summit.

Biden cautioned that governments and societies need to do better on the emergence of AI than was the case when social media platforms exploded, leading to widespread concern over the effects on mental health and misinformation. "Social media has shown us the harm that powerful technology can do without the safeguards in place," Biden said. "We must be clear-eyed and vigilant about the threats of emerging technology that can pose to our democracy and our values," he said. But AI also has an "enormous, enormous potential upside." — AFP

## G20 ministers fail to agree on fossil fuels roadmap

NEW DELHI: Energy ministers from the group of 20 nations meeting in India Saturday failed to agree on a roadmap to phase down the use of fossil fuels in the global energy mix. A final statement after the meeting did not even mention coal, a major contributor to global warming.

The dirty fuel is also a key energy source for many developing economies such as India—the world's most-populous country—and China, the world's second-largest economy. The failure to reach agreement in Goa comes despite G7 leaders agreeing in Hiroshima in May to "accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels" and with global temperatures hitting record highs, triggering floods, storms, and heatwaves.

Explaining the stalemate, G20 president India said that some members had emphasized the importance of seeking a "phase down of unabated fossil fuels, in line with different national circumstances". But "others had different views on the matter that abatement and removal technologies will address such concerns," it added.

## Top rice supplier India bans some exports

MUMBAI: The world's biggest rice exporter India has banned some overseas sales of the grain "with immediate effect", the government said, in a move that could drive international prices even higher.

Rice is a major world food staple and prices on international markets have soared to decade highs as the world grappled with the COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the impact of the El Nino weather phenomenon on production levels. India would ban exports of non-basmati white rice—which accounts for around a quarter of its total—the consumer affairs and food ministry said.

The move would "ensure adequate availability" and "allay the rise in prices in the domestic market", it said in a statement late Thursday. India accounts for more than 40 percent of all global rice shipments, so the decision could "risk exacerbating food insecurity in countries highly dependent on rice imports", data analytics firm Gro Intelligence said in a note.

Countries expected to be hit by the ban include



GANDHINAGAR, India: Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan (center) and Saudi Central Bank Governor Ayman Al-Sayari (right) arrive to attend the G20 meetings at the Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar. — AFP

A coalition of key EU economies—including Germany and France—and some of the most vulnerable island states this week urged the G20 to accelerate plans to reach net zero emissions and phase out fossil fuels, adding: "Humankind cannot afford to delay."

They called for greenhouse gas emissions to peak by 2025 at the latest and be cut by 43 percent by 2030, compared to 2019 levels, in line with recent updates from UN climate experts. But many devel-

oping economies argue that the developed West must pay more as a legacy polluter and greenhouse contributor. They insist that any transition needs huge capital and new technology, while giving up on polluting fuels without affordable alternatives will condemn their huge populations to poverty. G20 host nation India is itself only pledging to reach net zero by 2070, 20 years later than the commitment made by many other countries. — AFP



AMRITSAR: In this file photo taken on June 19, 2023, farmers plant rice saplings in a paddy field on the outskirts of Amritsar. — AFP

African nations, Turkey, Syria, and Pakistan—all of them already struggling with high food-price inflation—the firm added. Global demand saw Indian exports of non-basmati white rice jump 35 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, the ministry said. The increase came even after the government banned broken rice shipments and imposed a 20 percent export tax on white rice in September.

India exported 10.3 million tons of non-basmati white rice last year and Rabobank senior analyst

Oscar Tjakra said alternative suppliers did not have spare capacity to fill the gap. "Typically the major exporters are Thailand, Vietnam, and to some extent Pakistan and the US," he told AFP. "They won't have enough supply of rice to replace these."

Moscow's cancellation of the Black Sea grain deal that protected Ukrainian exports has already led to wheat prices creeping up, he pointed out. "Obviously this will add into inflation around the world because rice can be used as a substitute for wheat." — AFP

## China envoy calls Kenya economic ties a 'win-win'

NAIROBI: China's top diplomat Wang Yi during a visit to Kenya on Saturday praised the two countries' economic partnership as a "win-win", according to a statement from the Chinese authorities. Kenya and China have "become good friends with mutual trust in politics and good partners with win-win economic cooperation", according to the statement from the Chinese embassy in Kenya.

With the most dynamic economy in East Africa, Kenya is considered by the international community as a stable democracy in a troubled region. China is the second-largest donor to Kenya after the World Bank.

In Mombasa, on the Kenyan coast, China is financing the construction of a new terminal in East Africa's largest port. China has also loaned \$5 billion (4.7 billion euros) toward the most expensive infrastructure project in the country since its independence in 1963: a train line that since 2017 has connected the port city Mombasa with Naivasha, in the Rift Valley, via the capital Nairobi.

"The landmark project of the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway has completely changed the face of Kenya," the embassy's statement said. Kenyan President William Ruto, elected last year, in a tweet, stressed "our commitment to strengthening the Kenya-China strategic partnership centered on infrastructure development, climate change" But China is often accused of using its creditor status for gaining diplomatic or trade concessions, raising concerns about many African countries' ability to assume the debts contracted.

China, the world's number two economy, rejects practicing "debt-trap diplomacy" as an unfair criticism from Western rivals who have themselves burdened nations with huge debts. Kenya's economy is particularly burdened by debts of \$70 billion, around 67 percent of its GDP. After visiting Kenya, Wang will visit South Africa on July 24 and 25 ahead of the BRICS summit next month, a group that includes South Africa, Brazil, China, India and Russia. — AFP



## Business

# Rewetting German marshes to blunt climate change impact

## Germany creating Europe's largest reclaimed marshes

**MALCHIN, Germany:** Amid the fields of northern Germany a vast expanse of bulrushes has been planted to form one of Europe's largest reclaimed marshes. Just four years ago, the 10-hectare (25-acre) plot close to the town of Malchin was a simple field.

Like 98 percent of Germany's historic wetlands, the area slowly dried up over centuries as its peat was harvested and the soil cultivated for grain or keeping livestock. Now, the land has been rewetted and planted with rushes that rise up to two meters (seven feet) high.

With rubber boots that go up to her knees and a GPS navigation device in hand, biologist Meline Brendel wades through the marshes' stagnant waters. "Marshes cover three percent of the Earth's surface and trap twice as much CO2 as all forests," says Brendel.

Left alone, such bogs are massive sinks for carbon locked into the peat and prevented from escaping as gas by the water that covers the ground. Once dry, however, the earth releases the stored carbon when it comes into contact with oxygen. "In this region, marshes therefore emit more CO2 than all forms of transport put together," says the scientist. Over a year, one hectare of drained marsh-

land produces as much CO2 as a car travelling 145,000 kilometers (90,000 miles), according to the Greifswald Mire Centre.

### Wetland habitat

In Germany, current and former wetlands cover some five percent of the country's land area—although the overwhelming majority has been drained. To keep these emissions in check, the government-financed Paludi-PROGRESS project funded the rewetting of the former marshland. The land was crisscrossed with trenches, flooded and planted with bulrushes. Today, the area is habitat to a multitude of birds, fish, insects, spiders and amphibians. The bulrushes are cut each year and used for household insulation, among other practical applications.

Her eyes glued to the GPS, Brendel navigates her way through the wet maze, sinking a spike into the peat as she goes to measure the level of the water. "The problem is that projects like ours are still just pilots. The plants cannot yet be used on an industrial scale" as material for roofing or insulation, she says. The German government, which aims to make Europe's top economy carbon neutral by

2045, last year launched a four-billion-euro (\$4.5 billion), four-year plan of action to "improve the general state of ecosystems" in the country. Half of the program's funds will go toward protecting marshes. A new law encouraging such efforts within the EU was recently adopted by the European Parliament. However, the programs have run into opposition from farmers.

For Brendel, the point is not to "force the rewetting of fields on farmers", but to convince them of its importance for the climate and the possibility to make a living from cultivating wetland. The 28-year-old scientist concedes that farming marshes is currently "not recognized as agriculture and farmers therefore don't have access to organic farming subsidies". "We need to make it more accessible and less bureaucratic to turn drained land back into marshes and to share what we have learned."

Twenty years ago, Bavarian farmer Lorenz Kratzer opted for an intermediate solution: keeping livestock on marshland that is slightly less wet than normal and giving his animals plenty of land to roam. On a hot summer's day in Freising in southern Germa-



**MALCHIN:** German scientist Meline Brendel, who is specialized in paludiculture and plant ecology at the Greifswald Mire Centre, controls the water height and quality in a swamp of a rewetted mire area in Neukalen near Malchin, northeastern Germany, on June 15, 2023. — AFP

ny, 20 or so of his cows seek the shade of the trees and bushes growing on his marshland used for grazing. As the soil dries out due to climate change, the 64-year-old says it "would be a very

good thing... to let the marshes return to nature, to flood them again". "The creation of pastures goes along well with this. You can see that the grass is growing better," he said. — AFP

## Gulf Bank deposits KD 1m into Sharefa Ghloom's account

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank welcomed Sharefa Mohamad Ghloom – the winner of the semi-annual Al-Danah draw of KD 1 million – which took place amid a wide audience at the Avenues Mall, in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

Following the completion of the award procedures, and the deposit of the KD 1 million into her personal account, the 20th millionaire of the Al-Danah account, Ghloom, expressed her joy and happiness towards this unforgettable event and thanked Gulf Bank for always rewarding its customers. The winner indicated that she was looking for a savings account that would provide customers with special prizes, and that nothing was better than the Al-Danah Millionaire account. She further stated that she

has had an Al-Danah account for more than 13 years now, and that the majority of her family members have accounts at Gulf Bank as well.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking Mohammad Al-Qattan said: "We congratulate Sharefa Mohamad Ghloom on winning the semi-annual Al-Danah draw prize of KD 1 million. At Gulf Bank, we always strive to provide an exceptional and distinctive, banking experience for our customers. This is part of our community role in rewarding savers and encouraging a culture of saving."

He added: "There are still many opportunities to win in the monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual draws and we are excited to continue rewarding our customers for saving in the Al-Danah account. We encourage everyone to continue saving to increase their chances of winning the grand prize draw of KD 2 mil-



**Mohammad Al-Qattan**



**Greeting the winner of the semi-annual Al-Danah draw.**

lion, that is set to happen on January 18, 2024; keeping in mind that the last chance to deposit and qualify for the grand draw prize is September 30, 2023."

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win

KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million and a grand draw prize of KD 2 million.

Moreover, to enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account at any time, and to increase their chances of winning, account holders must either maintain the minimum deposit amount of KD 200 or increase their Al-Danah savings. The higher the balance in an account, the more chances get accumulated over time. Additionally, opening an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, with customers being able to open their accounts online through Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking services.

The Al-Danah Millionaire account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, that is ideal for depositing money into their account, any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

## India conglomerate Reliance's profits hit by oil slump

**MUMBAI:** Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries reported weaker-than-expected quarterly profits Friday, weighed down by its oil-to-chemicals arm even as its consumer-facing divisions posted healthy profits. Reliance, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a 10.8 percent fall in net profit to 160.1 billion rupees (\$1.95 billion) in the three months to June 30, compared to the same period last year.

Revenues from operations for India's most valuable company by market capitalization slipped by 5.3 percent year-on-year to 2.1 trillion rupees (\$25.7 billion). Revenues from Reliance's oil-to-chemicals business—which account for more than half of the company's overall sales—came in at 1.33 trillion rupees (\$16.2 billion), a 17.7 percent decline from the previous corresponding period.

"O2C (oil-to-chemicals) segment delivered a resilient performance despite short-term macro chal-

lenges," Reliance said in its earnings report, adding that the year-on-year readings were skewed due to last year's "historic high" refining margins. "Demand was impacted by destocking on recessionary fears and high interest rates, as well as slower-than-expected ramp-up in China markets."

Telecoms arm Reliance Jio saw net profit lift by 12.18 percent to 48.6 billion rupees (\$593 million) from the previous corresponding period, and by 3.12 percent from the first three months of the year.

It added more than nine million new subscribers for the period. Revenues from Reliance's retail business jumped 19.46 percent on-year to 699.4 billion rupees (\$85.3 billion) for the quarter.

The Mumbai-headquartered firm reported a record-high footfall of 249 million for the quarter, with 555 new store openings. The company declared a dividend of nine rupees per share. Reliance's multibillion-dollar enterprise has been driven by its oil and petrochemicals businesses. In recent years, the company has diversified into new areas including telecoms and retail.

On Thursday, the company spun off Jio Financial Services in a bid to expand its reach into the consumer lending space. Reliance Industries shares closed 3.19 percent lower in Mumbai ahead of the earnings announcement on Friday. — AFP

The central bank is now headed by Hafize Gaye Erkan, the first woman to hold the job. Her resume includes diplomas from Princeton and Harvard, a top job at Wall Street titan Goldman Sachs and the role of co-CEO of California-based First Republic Bank. Erdogan also named former Merrill Lynch economist Mehmet Simsek as finance minister.

Both have promoted conventional policies that include interest rate hikes to combat inflation—the opposite of the approach long backed by Erdogan, who has a history of dumping ministers. BlueBay Asset Management economist Timothy Ash called Thursday's move by the central bank a "terrible decision" that was "again under-delivering". He said a 17.5 percent interest rate is not enough to bring down inflation of around 40 percent.

"It will again play to the script of those saying that Simsek and Erkan don't really have a mandate to deliver real policy tightening," said Ash. The rate hike comes one day after Erdogan ended a Gulf trip aimed at securing investments to boost Turkey's flagging economy by signing agreements worth more than \$50 billion in the United Arab Emirates, according to Emirati state media.

During his tour, which also included stops in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Erdogan presided over the signing of lucrative deals to boost the ailing Turkish economy. Ankara has recently repaired relations with Gulf states including the UAE and Saudi Arabia after years of rivalry following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. Turkish support for organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood initially spurred a rupture with Gulf states, which view the movement as a terrorist group.

Hamish Kinnear, senior Middle East and North Africa analyst at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft, said Gulf nations want to improve relations with their powerful regional neighbor but are also looking for investment opportunities to diversify away from oil and gas. He said the Gulf nations that Ankara will pursue its post-election reset of economic policy and "it is therefore an open question as to how fast these promised Gulf investments will arrive while inflation remains high in Turkey." — AFP

## Trudon celebrates 380th anniversary by launching the Tuileries collection



**Trudon and Action Trading Company officials. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat**

By Ghadeer Ghloom

In collaboration with Action General Trading Company as its exclusive distributor, Trudon launches the Tuileries collection - a new scent available in four candle sizes — a diffuser and a new Perfume Le Noir Mortel, at Trudon's new high-end premium boutique located at The Avenues mall in Kuwait to celebrate the brand's 380th anniversary.

Trudon's Commercial Director EMEA Aurélien Lefèvre expressed his pride in celebrating the anniversary of Trudon and shared a brief of the candles' unique history. "We are a French brand, created in 1643, that is about 380 years ago, which is quite unique for the candles industry. We have been there for many centuries providing high quality candles to kings and queens of France. On this occasion we have launched this specific candle — The Tuileries — a pink candle that is attributed to Queen of France Marie Antoinette, who loved pink roses. The specific scent and color of this candle is related to this flower for this anniversary," he said.

Lefèvre also expressed his satisfaction with partnering with Action Group Company. "We have a magnificent partnership with the Action Group Company. We have recently opened a boutique at The Avenues mall in Kuwait, which is one of the most beautiful boutiques in the world that has all the Trudon styles. You can find all the products as well as exclusive products at the boutique," he said.

Lefèvre spoke about the uniqueness of Trudon Candles, stressing Trudon uses the best quality wax in the world. And the scent is powerful like a perfume, not like a simple candle. Trudon meticulously follows up and chooses the steps for creating the candle at their factory in Normandy in France. He also said by next year, they are thinking of developing and having better and bigger plans for GCC countries.

Business Development Manager Sheikh Abdullah Khalid F Al-Sabah told Kuwait Times: "We are so happy to celebrate the 380th anniversary of this brand, specifically with the presence of Aurélien and other VIP guests from Kuwait and Action Group Company that are here today. I am very thrilled for this partnership that started a year ago, and we hope to expand to other GCC countries. Action Trading Company is a family-owned business. It includes luxury cosmetics, as well as FMCG, food and non-food, and food and beverage.

"Trudon is an example under our company's um-



**Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah and Aurélien Lefèvre.**



**Display of Trudon candles.**

brella of luxury items. Trudon is also a family-owned business, which goes hand in hand with Action Group Company. Also, ATC will open a new boutique in Dubai to cater to UAE residents and tourists who appreciate luxury products offered by Trudon, which will be launched towards the year end. We have a specialized online portal within Trudon's international platform to cater to our customers across the GCC."

Sheikh Abdullah added: "I would like to thank my uncle and Chairman Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Sabah for his continuous support and efforts. His vision and dedication were instrumental in making this a reality."



**Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah welcomes the guests.**

## Turkey hikes interest rates

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey's central bank hiked its main interest rate for the second month in a row on Thursday but analysts said the unwinding of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unconventional policy was too timid to tame inflation. After years of cuts that aimed to boost growth but fuelled inflation and caused the lira to tumble, the bank doubled its rate last month from 8.5 percent to 15 percent. The latest hike was smaller, at 2.5 percentage points, taking the rate to 17.5 percent.

The central bank said in a statement that it "decided to continue the monetary tightening process in order to establish the disinflation course as soon as possible, to anchor inflation expectations, and to control the deterioration in pricing behavior." The rate increases have been undertaken since Erdogan named investor-friendly faces to head the central bank and the finance ministry following his re-election in tight May polls.

The bank said after the first rate hike in June that the move was only the start of a process aimed at bringing Turkey's annual inflation rate of nearly 40 percent to single figures "as soon as possible".

The inflation rate reached 85 percent late last year and the central bank burned through most of its reserves trying to prop up the lira—down 90 percent against the dollar over 10 years—from even bigger falls. But the two hikes have disappointed analysts, who had forecast a five-point hike for Thursday. "Turkey's central bank today once again underwhelmed expectations and the slow and steady tightening is pushing the limits on what policymakers can get away with," said Liam Peach, senior emerging markets economist at Capital Economics.

"There are now clearer risks that the policy shift falls short and that the lira comes under much larger downward pressure," he added. The lira fell 0.5 percent on Thursday to nearly 27 liras to the dollar.



## Business

# Rising climate risks fuel surge in US home insurance costs

## Natural disasters destroyed assets worth over \$140bn in US last year

WASHINGTON: When Jack Hierholzer moved back to Pensacola in the Florida panhandle, it felt like a homecoming. "My kids were born in Pensacola, and so we have a lot of friends in the neighborhood, we have some family here," he told AFP in a phone interview.

But less than three years later, he's thinking of leaving the city after seeing his home insurance premium more than triple to \$6,500 -- due in part to the rising costs to insurers of extreme weather fueled by climate change. "I work from home full time, so I could live anywhere in the country where I have a high-speed internet connection," he said. "So if it gets bad enough, we're mobile, we can move," he added. "And we will."

### Rising premiums

Natural disasters destroyed assets worth more than \$140 billion in the United States last year, of which close to \$90 billion was insured, according to data from Munich Re. The reinsurance firm—which provides insurance to insurance companies—estimated that around 70 percent of the total damage was caused by Hurricane Ian, which devastated Florida's west coast last September.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is unequivocal about the impact of human activity on global warming, and recently noted that man-made climate change "is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe."

As extreme weather events have become more common, the costs of insuring against them has risen sharply. Home insurance premiums in the United States rose by nine percent on average last year—and by far more in some states—according to the Insurance Information Institute (III), an industry trade

body. The main drivers of higher premiums have been the rising cost of reinsurance, and the growing cost of rebuilding materials.

Reinsurance costs have increased by between 30 and 40 percent year-on-year, according to Mark Friedlander, director of corporate communications at III. "As we see reinsurance continue to move upward in terms of year-over-year renewal costs, clearly climate risk is the primary factor for that," he told AFP. Rebuilding costs, meanwhile, have risen by around 30 percent over the last five years, due largely to pandemic-related supply chain disruptions.

### Regional variations

At the state level, a host of local factors have added to the challenges caused by climate change. In California, for example, insurance premiums are well below the national average at around \$1,300, according to III, due in large part to state laws that give the government a greater say over any increases. While this should be great news for homeowners, it has also made it more challenging for insurers, who have found themselves unable to pass on the rising costs of insuring properties against increasingly severe wildfires. State Farm, one of the largest insurers in the state, recently announced it would stop accepting new applications for homeowner insurance in California due to its "rapidly growing catastrophe exposure."

And in Florida, premiums have soared due to a combination of factors, including historically generous laws for homeowners looking to sue their insurers, and the growing cost of payouts related to hurricanes, according to III. "We have the man-made factors combined with the climate risk factors, and that's a formula for extreme levels of insurance premium," Friedlander said.



FORT MYERS BEACH, US: Debris left by Hurricane Ian in Fort Myers Beach, Florida, on November 2, 2022. — AFP

While homeowners have seen their premiums surge, the number of people without home insurance across the United States has remained relatively steady at around seven percent, according to III. This is because US mortgage holders are required to have home insurance, meaning only those who can pay off their loans in full can take the risk of doing without it. With his in-

urance premium now costing more each month than his mortgage repayments, Hierholzer in Pensacola is weighing this option as he considers his next steps. "If insurance is so high that I'm effectively buying a new house every 12 years, then it would be much smarter to not insure the house, just pay the mortgage off and then roll your dice," he said. — AFP

## Brazil's Embraer to build flying taxis in Sao Paulo

SAO PAULO: Brazilian aeronautics company Embraer and its urban mobility subsidiary Eve said Thursday they would build a factory near Sao Paulo to manufacture electric flying taxis that could take off as soon as 2026.

The factory for "electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft" or eVTOL, will be built in the city of Taubate in Sao Paulo state, the companies announced on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Brazilian aviation pioneer Alberto Santos Dumont.

Taubate is a city of some 310,000 inhabitants about 140 kilometers (87 miles) from Sao Paulo, Brazil's economic capital. The drone-like passenger vehicles, which resemble small helicopters, will initially be used in taxi fleets, with the first flights costing about \$50 to \$100 per person per trip, company sources told AFP. The initial flights will have a pilot, but a later rollout of self-piloted vehicles is also on the cards.

Each eVTOL can carry four to six passengers. The vehicles will be 100 percent electric, allowing for emissions-free flights. Embraer said it has already received orders for 2,850 eVTOLs worth about \$1.5 billion from 28 clients in several countries, including helicopter operators, airlines and flight-sharing platforms. Listed on the New York Stock Exchange, Eve Air Mobility, which has not yet reported revenues, recorded a net loss of \$25 million in the first quarter of 2023, due in particular to expenses related to research and development of the eVTOL.

Sao Paulo, a megalopolis of 11.5 million people with monster traffic jams, has the largest helicopter fleet in the world. "We believe in the enormous potential of the global Urban Air Mobility market," Embraer president Francisco Gomes Neto said in a statement. Added Eve vice president of program management and operation, Alice Altissimo: "We are equipped to efficiently scale the production volume sustainably to meet the demands of a growing market." — AFP

## Fed plays catch-up with new instant payments system

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve launched its long-awaited instant payments system on Thursday, bringing the United States in line with other countries from Britain to Brazil where real-time payments platforms already operate. The Fed hopes the FedNow payments service will convince US consumers and businesses to ditch cash and checks, which are still widely used across the country, and embrace the faster payments its system allows. "The Federal Reserve built the FedNow Service to help make everyday payments over the coming years faster and more convenient," Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said in a statement.

"Over time, as more banks choose to use this new tool, the benefits to individuals and businesses will include enabling a person to immediately receive a paycheck, or a company to instantly access funds when an invoice is paid," he added. Just 35 of the more-than 4,000 US banks signed up to FedNow ahead of its Thursday launch, according to the Fed, including a few large lenders like JP Morgan and Wells Fargo. But the US central bank said it hopes that more lenders will use the service, as businesses and consumers embrace the ease of being able to transfer up to half a million dollars in near-real time.

Funds transfers in the US currently take "an inordinate amount of time compared with modern technology," EY Parthenon's chief economist Gregory Daco told AFP. Customers of the 35 banks which signed up will now have access to real-time transfers, which should lead to a decline in the use of checks to pay things like utility bill and rent, he added. — AFP

## NBK launches enhanced IVR services

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always seeks to provide innovative and advanced digital banking products and services to better meet all customers' needs. In this context, the bank announced the launch of its enhanced Interactive Voice Response (IVR) services, which aim to enrich customers' banking experience by adopting the latest technologies in this field, thus making transactions safer, faster and more convenient.

The enhanced IVR services empower customers to conveniently access a wide range of banking services at their fingertips, anytime and anywhere, by offering the following key features and benefits:

- With the upgraded IVR system, customers can effortlessly perform a variety of transactions, including opening new accounts, balance inquiries, fund transfers, bill payments, credit and prepaid card services, and more, all through a simple and user-friendly interface.
- NBK's enhanced IVR services is now offering more personalized and intelligent interactions, leveraging customer recognition through their phone numbers.
- The upgraded IVR services offer 24/7 availability, allowing customers to access their accounts,

make transactions, and seek assistance at any time, regardless of branch operating hours.

• Since security is a top priority for NBK, the enhanced IVR services incorporate advanced robust security measures in all their transactions.

Speaking on this, Tamer Allam, Head of Contact Center at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Enhancing our IVR services comes as part of our endeavors to integrate our services provided through various digital channels, and to meet our customers' needs and offer them highly convenient banking experience through quick, easy and secure banking transactions."

"The enhanced IVR services reflect NBK's investment in state-of-the-art technologies, leveraging its fast-paced digital transformation to meet customers' needs and expectations, which cements its position as a leading provider of highly advanced banking services in Kuwait and across the region," he added.

"In developing all services, NBK relies on in-depth awareness of customers' needs which is gained through continuous communication with them using various channels. Consequently, it ensures providing relevant products and services that meet and even



Tamer Allam



exceed customers' expectations," he noted.

NBK always seeks to offer its customers unmatched banking experience 24/7, reflecting its solid leadership, which it seeks to maintain by meeting all customers' banking needs, and continuing to provide the best, most advanced and secure services. NBK continues to cement its leading position in the banking sector through the largest domestic banking network in Kuwait, including branch, ATM and POS networks. It also allows its customers to control their accounts and manage their finances all day and week round through NBK Online and Mobile Banking, in addition to NBK Call Center on 1801801 available 24/7 to receive customers' enquiries and attend to their needs.

## Indian software giant Infosys cuts growth outlook

MUMBAI: Indian information technology giant Infosys sharply cut its revenue growth outlook on Thursday as it reported softer-than-expected profits during the April-June quarter on the back of global economic headwinds.

Infosys, India's second-largest software firm, slashed its revenue growth guidance for the financial year ending March 2024 to 1.0-3.5 percent in constant currency terms,

down from its previous estimate of four to seven percent. The Bengaluru-headquartered firm said net profit came in at 59.45 billion rupees (\$725.5 million) in the three months to June 30, an increase of 10.9 percent from the same period last year.

But net profit fell by 3.0 percent compared to the January-March period, a reflection of the tough conditions facing the sector amid a slowing global economy.

The results were slightly below analysts' expectations. "The way a lot of the transformation programs that are running today, they are funded from cost efficiency that comes through that program itself. So overall, the decision-making sometimes is slowing down," Infosys chief executive Salil Parekh said at a media briefing. "And we're

seeing the start dates—in terms of where some of these programs are likely to start—more towards the back end of the year, and that's the reason we're seeing the revenue impact through the year."

Revenue grew 4.2 percent year-on-year and rose by 1.0 percent quarter-on-quarter in constant currency terms. The company said it won large deals worth \$2.3 billion in the quarter, up from \$2.1 billion in the first three months of the year.

Employee attrition, a closely watched metric in the tech sector, eased to 17.3 percent from 20.9 percent in the previous quarter. Its overall headcount fell by almost 7,000 during the period.

Rival Indian software firm Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) reported last week

a slightly better-than-expected net profit of 110.7 billion rupees (\$1.35 billion) for the months of April to June, up 16.8 percent year-on-year but down 2.79 percent from the March quarter. TCS had been boosted by a robust order book and said it was building capabilities in newer technologies such as generative artificial intelligence. Both firms gained from an IT boom that saw India become the world's back office for subcontracted work. A boom during the COVID pandemic, which had boosted demand for digital services, has since waned amid an uncertain global environment. Numerous headwinds, including persistently elevated inflation levels that have triggered higher interest rates and financial sector turmoil, have turned clients cautious. — AFP

## Japan's inflation accelerates to 3.3% in June

TOKYO: Japan's consumer prices rose 3.3 percent year-on-year in June, with the pace of inflation accelerating from the 3.2 percent recorded in May, government data showed Friday. The latest data—which matched market expectations—comes ahead of the Bank of Japan's (BoJ) monetary policy meeting next week.

Most market watchers expect the central bank to keep its super-loose monetary easing policy in place.

Stripping out fresh food and energy, Japan's prices rose 4.2 percent, data published by the internal affairs ministry showed. Friday's core consumer price index figure matched the market's expectations of 3.3 percent recorded in a Bloomberg survey.

"The current strong reading of CPI doesn't mean the BoJ will make major policy changes," Masamichi Adachi, economist at UBS Securities, told Bloomberg. "It's pretty clear that inflation will slow from here as import-driven price gains taper off." While electricity prices declined again in June, processed food prices rose, the ministry said. Inflation in Japan has been less extreme than price hikes seen in countries such as the United States, which have been fuelled by the war in Ukraine and supply-chain disruptions. The US Federal Reserve and many other central banks have raised interest rates to tackle high inflation.



TOKYO: A customer browses products at a drug store in central Tokyo on July 21, 2023. Japan's consumer prices rose 3.3 percent year-on-year in June, with the pace of inflation accelerating from the 3.2 percent recorded in May, government data showed on July 21. — AFP

But the Bank of Japan has stuck to its long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policy in an attempt to boost economic growth, causing the yen to fall against the dollar.

Only a minority of analysts expect the central bank to tweak its policy when it meets next week, Bloomberg said. The Bank of Japan's two-percent in-

flation target, which it hopes will lead to sustainable growth in the world's third-largest economy, has been surpassed every month for more than a year. But the central bank sees recent price rises as driven by temporary factors, and so has stuck to its easing policies such as a negative interest rate. — AFP



Lifestyle

**A** mile-thick ice sheet in Greenland vanished around 416,000 years ago during a period of moderate natural warming, driving global sea rise to levels that would spell catastrophe for coastal regions today, a study said Thursday.

The results overturn a long-held view that the world's largest island was an impregnable fortress of ice over the past 2.5 million years, and instead show it will be far more vulnerable to human-caused climate change than previously thought.

"If we want to understand the future, we need to understand the past," University of Vermont scientist Paul Bierman, who co-led the paper published in Science, told AFP.



An aerial photo shows icebergs floating in Disko Bay, Ilulissat, western Greenland.

The research relied on an ice core extracted 4,560 feet (1,390 meters) under the surface of Northwest Greenland by scientists at Camp Century, a secretive US military base that operated in the 1960s. This 12-foot long tube of soil and rock was lost in a freezer only to be rediscovered in 2017.

Scientists were stunned to learn it contained not just sediment but leaves and moss -- irrefutable evidence of an ice-free landscape, perhaps covered by an ancient forest that woolly mammoths would have roamed.

**A green Greenland**

Though researchers were deprived for decades of access to the precious sample, Bierman said in some ways it was "providential," as the cutting-edge



File photo shows the Zion Church in Ilulissat, western Greenland.



**Greenland melted recently, says study that raises future sea level threat**

Visitors to the Icefjord Centre (Kangiata Illorsua) in Greenland walk along the boardwalk taking them to the icebergs and glacier in Ilulissat. — AFP photos

techniques used to date the core are very recent.

Key among these is "luminescence dating," which allowed scientists to determine the last time that sediment buried beneath the Earth's surface was exposed to light.

"As sediment is buried beneath the surface, background radiation from soil fills in the little holes or imperfections in minerals like quartz or feldspar, and builds up what we call a luminescence signal over time," co-author Drew Christ told AFP.

In a dark room, scientists took interior strips of the ice core and exposed them to blue-green or infrared light, releasing trapped electrons that form a kind of ancient clock that shows the last time they were exposed to sunlight, which erases the luminescence signal.

"And the only way to do that at Camp Century is to remove a mile of ice," said Tammy Rittenour, a co-author of the study at Utah State University. "Plus, to have plants, you have to have light." Luminescence dating provided the end point of the ice-free period, with the start point coming from another technique.

Inside the quartz from the Camp Century core, rare forms -- called isotopes -- of the elements beryllium and aluminum build up when the ground is exposed to the sky and cosmic rays.

Looking at the ratio of the normal

forms of these elements to the rare isotopes, the scientists could derive a window for how long the rocks were at the surface versus how long they were buried. They found the sediment was exposed for less than 14,000 years, meaning this was how long the area was ice-free.

**Coastal cities imperiled**

The Camp Century core was taken only 800 miles from the North Pole, with the study showing the entire region would have been covered in vegetation.

This took place in a time of natural warming called an interglacial peri-

od, when temperatures were similar to today, around 1.8-2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1-1.5C) warmer than the pre-industrial era. The team's modeling showed that the ice sheet melting would have caused between five and twenty feet of sea level rise at that time.

This suggests that every coastal region of the world, home to many global population centers, are at risk of submersion in the coming centuries.

Joseph MacGregor, a climate scientist at NASA who was not involved in the study, noted that the interglacial period that warmed Greenland during this period lasted tens of thousands of years, much longer than what humans have induced so far.

But even so, "we've far surpassed the magnitude of the greenhouse gas forcing back then," he said.

Atmospheric levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide are currently 420 parts per million (ppm) against 280 ppm during Greenland's ice-free period, and this will remain in the skies for thousands of years.

"We're doing a giant experiment on Earth's atmosphere, and we don't know the results of that experiment," said Bierman. "I don't take that as 'Oh my god the sky is falling,' I take that as we've got to get it together." — AFP



File photo shows Icebergs float in Disko Bay, Ilulissat, western Greenland.



**More than 60% of world now on social media**

**N**early five billion people, or slightly more than 60 percent of the world's population, are active on social media, according to a recent study.

That represents an increase of 3.7 percent over the past year, according to calculations by digital advisory firm Kepios in its latest quarterly report.

The number of social network users is approaching the number that use the 5.19 billion which use the internet, or 64.5 percent of the world population.

There are major differences between regions. Only one person out of 11 in east and central Africa use social media. In India, now the world's most populous nation, the figure is one out of three.

The amount of time spent on social media has also increased, by two minutes to 2 hours and 26 minutes per day. Here again there are large disparities, with Brazilians spending an average of 3 hours and 49 minutes per day on social media while the Japanese less than an hour.

The average social media user is on seven platforms. Meta has three of the favourite apps with WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook.

China has three apps, WeChat, TikTok and its local version Douyin. Twitter, Messenger and Telegram round out the top social media platforms. — AFP

**Police hunt 'lioness' on the loose around Berlin**

**A** wild animal, believed to be a lioness, was on the loose in Berlin's southern outskirts on Thursday, with residents urged to stay indoors as hunters joined police in a major search operation. Police first issued the alarm in the early hours after two people saw what appeared to be a lioness chasing a wild boar down a street less than five kilometres (three miles) from the German capital.

The two passersby spotted the feline around midnight in the Kleinmachnow suburb, southwest of Berlin.

They shared mobile phone footage of the animal with police, who believe the images are genuine, Kleinmachnow mayor Michael Grubert told a press conference.

The animal was later also spotted by police officers themselves, said Kerstin Schroeder, police spokeswoman in the Brandenburg region around Berlin.

Brandenburg police issued a warning to the public about the beast's presence, putting the southwestern suburbs on alert.

Despite a massive operation involving over 100 police officers as well as drones, helicopters and thermal-imaging cameras, there was still no sign of the animal by Thursday afternoon.

Mayor Grubert urged residents to keep heeding police advice "not to leave the house if possible", and to keep pets indoors.

It certainly wasn't the time "to go jogging in the woods", he added. The creature was believed not to have strayed far from the Kleinmachnow area where it was first seen, Grubert said. Hunters and veterinarians were also taking part in the search, as were officers from the neighbouring Berlin police force.

At 5:00 pm (1500 GMT), Brandenburg police issued an update saying the search would continue through the night if necessary. Despite numerous tips from citizens, none of the information had led to the animal's whereabouts so far, it added.

"The operational measures will continue until a risk to the population can be ruled out," police said. Residents in the area were advised "to act with appropriate caution and to avoid the adjacent forests".

**No animals missing**

It remains unclear where the feline could have come from. No zoos or circuses have reported any missing big cats, officials said.



Michel Rogall, a circus director in the neighbouring suburb of Teltow who was woken up by police at 2:00 am, said that the animal might not be a lion at all. "If it's a lion, I'll eat my broom," he told the Tagesspiegel newspaper.

The Kleinmachnow municipality decided to keep daycare centres open, but asked staff not to venture out with children. Traders at a local market were asked not to set up their stalls. — AFP



This handout photograph taken by Hubble Space Telescope, shows an image of the asteroid Dimorphos, nearly four months after the asteroid was impacted by NASA's DART mission. — AFP

**Asteroid-smashing NASA probe sent boulders into space**

**W**hen a NASA spacecraft successfully knocked an asteroid off course last year it sent dozens of boulders skittering into space, images from the Hubble telescope showed on Thursday.

NASA's fridge-sized DART probe smashed into the pyramid-sized, rugby ball-shaped asteroid Dimorphos roughly 11 million kilometres (6.8 million miles) from Earth in September last year. The spacecraft knocked the asteroid significantly off course in the first-ever such test of Earth's planetary defences.

New images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope show that the collision also sent 37 boulders -- ranging from one metre (three feet) to seven metres (22 feet) across -- floating into the cosmos.

They represent around two percent of the boulders that were already scattered across the surface of the loosely-held-together asteroid, scientists estimated in a new study.

The finding suggests that possible future missions to divert life-threatening asteroids heading towards Earth could also spray off boulders in our direction. But these particular rocks do not pose any threat to Earth -- indeed they have barely gone anywhere. — AFP



## Lifestyle



A plastic tube containing sample mosquitoes in Zagreb.--AFP photos



Medical entomologist Ana Klobucar (center) and her assistants sitting in front of plastic containers with sterile male Tiger mosquitoes that will be released, in Zagreb.



Plastic containers with sterile male Tiger mosquitoes that will be released, in Zagreb.

## Croatia targets latest climate-change threat: Mosquitoes

**H**ordes of buzzing but sterile mosquitoes are being let loose in Zagreb as Croatia gets ahead of worries that climate change could bring tropical diseases to the Mediterranean nation.

The release is part of a pilot project focused on eradicating invasive Asian Tiger mosquitoes known for carrying sicknesses like Dengue Fever, Chikungunya and Zika.

The species has appeared to thrive in the country and across the region in recent years due in part to climate change -- with the warmer weather providing fertile ground for the mosquito.



Medical entomologist Ana Klobucar sampling mosquitoes several days after their release in order to establish their reach and life span, in Zagreb.

"It's too early to say whether this one will yield results," Zagreb resident Kruno Lokotar told AFP. "But I'm glad that we are not just sticking with spraying."

Croatia's effort centres on a method that uses sterilised male mosquitoes -- which once released into the wild will



An employee of the Zagreb-based teaching institute for public health, Andrija Stampar, sitting next to plastic containers with sterile Tiger mosquito males, in Zagreb.

mate with females and neutralise the potential for future offspring. The Zagreb project kickstarted in June, when 100,000 mosquitoes were released in a high-risk area with thick foliage where mosquitoes often congregate.

"If we release a sufficient number of sterile males during a certain period in that area, the mosquito population in that area will decrease," Ana Klobucar, a medical entomologist of the Zagreb-based teaching institute of public health who is overseeing the project, told AFP.

The plan is rooted in the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) -- a method that has been used for decades across the world to combat various harmful insects, but is still being tested for its effectiveness against mosquitoes in ur-

ban areas. Croatia started using it for mosquitoes last year in northern Istria peninsula.

This year a total of 1.2 million specially treated insects will be released there over a three-month period, entomologist Nediljko Landeka of the regional public health institute told AFP.

### Climate change impact

The insects -- which have been rendered sterile after exposure to gamma rays -- are sourced from a laboratory in Italy, and shipped 500 kilometres (310 miles) to Croatia in special boxes.

Once received, Klobucar and her assistants carefully remove plastic bowls with the insects from cardboard tubes before they are later dispersed in local gardens in the target area.

Croatia's programme coincides with increasingly dire warning from experts that global warming could make swaths of Europe more vulnerable to infectious diseases spread by mosquito bites.

The presence of the Asian Tiger mosquito in Croatia was first recorded in 2004 after arriving in Europe in the late 1970s, with experts suggesting they made the journey in used tyres that arrived in Albania from China.

The breed has now spread to more than a dozen European countries, with the Mediterranean region having been hit the hardest, according to official figures. As the mercury rises across the globe, the Asian Tiger mosquito is moving further north including in areas that were considered too cold for the species to thrive, including in Switzerland and Germany.

"We are afraid that together with the species, viruses could also easily adapt in the future to new environments," warned Greek entomologist Antonios Michaelakis.

Michaelakis -- who is also a researcher at the Benaki Phytopathological Institute in Athens -- has been instrumental in sharing his experiences from a programme in Greece with his Croatian counterparts.

In Greece in 2019, the project succeeded in slashing the population of Asian Tiger mosquitoes by 90 percent, he told AFP. During a trial of the technique last year in Croatia's Istria, up to 14 percent of mosquito eggs in the area were found to be sterile and jumped to nearly 60 percent this year, Landeka added. --AFP



Medical entomologist Ana Klobucar looking through a microscope in her office at the Zagreb-based teaching institute for public health in Zagreb.



A microscopic view of a mosquito in a petri dish at the Zagreb-based teaching institute for public health in Zagreb.



Asian Tiger mosquitoes in petri dishes at the Zagreb-based teaching institute for public health in Zagreb.

## Presumed Beethoven skull pieces return to Vienna

**S**kull fragments, presumed to be from Ludwig van Beethoven, have returned to Vienna, where the legendary 19th century German composer was buried, experts said Thursday.

US businessman Paul Kaufmann donated the fragments, which he inherited, to the Medical University of Vienna where researchers will probe the illnesses suffered by the impresario and his cause of death. "This is where the bones belong, back in Vienna," Kaufmann told reporters.

Austrian coroner Christian Reiter said the 10 fragments, including two bigger pieces, one from the back of the head and one from the right side of the forehead, had "great value".

"We have received really valuable material here, with which we hope to continue to research in the next years.



The skull fragments, presumed to be of Ludwig van Beethoven are on display at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria.

That was Beethoven's wish too," Reiter said. The composer battled illness through his life and explicitly asked for his body to be studied, Reiter added.

Beethoven, whose piano, chamber and symphonic works are among the greatest of Western classical music, died at 56 in 1827 after years of struggling with unknown ailments, including increasing deafness in his later years.

The fragments are believed to be the only surviving fragments of Beethoven's skull, Reiter added.

Kaufmann said he found the fragments in a small box with "Beethoven" scratched on it in a family safety deposit box in a French bank in 1990.

Kaufmann's great great uncle, Aus-



US businessman Paul Kaufmann speaks to journalists at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria. — AFP photos

trian doctor Franz Romeo Seligmann, is presumed to have acquired them in 1863 during an exhumation of Beethoven's body. Kaufmann said the fragments would now be analysed further to confirm that they belong to the late composer, who died in Vienna.

### Cause of death mystery

The available evidence suggests that they are authentic. In 2005, a group of US scientists announced that tests on hair of Beethoven and the skull fragments showed he died from lead poisoning, which may have also been responsible for his hearing loss.

Researchers at the US Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois said the bone fragments, tested at the country's most powerful X-ray facility, had high concentrations of lead, matching earlier findings of lead in his hair.

The source of the lead is unknown, but they said it may have come from a wine goblet made with the metal. Alternatively, some medical treatments in the 18th and 19th centuries made use of heavy metals like lead and mercury. Beethoven suffered abdominal pains in his 20s which became progressively worse, and the composer saw a large number of physicians in search of a cure.

In March, researchers who sequenced Beethoven's genome using authenticated hair samples said liver failure, or cirrhosis, was likely behind his death brought about by a number of factors, including alcohol consumption. — AFP

## Fur-ever after: Indonesians sorry after lavish dog 'wedding' backlash

**T**wo Indonesian women have apologised after a lavish "wedding" for their dogs sparked a backlash in the middle-income country, where wealth distribution is one of the most unequal in the world.

Two Alaskan Malamutes were wedded Friday at a mall in the capital Jakarta, donning traditional Javanese costumes alongside their owners and relatives at a fake ceremony that reportedly cost 200 million rupiah (\$13,350).



A social media uproar followed after images emerged of the wolf-like dogs taking each other's paws in marriage at the extravagant ceremony, forcing the owners into a contrite news conference.

"We regret it very much and we would like to apologise for the Javanese culture enthusiasts and all Indonesians who were uncomfortable and hurt by the event," Indira Ratnasari, owner of female dog Luna, said Wednesday. "We

had no intention to insult the Indonesian and the Javanese culture," she said, according to footage posted on her makeup artist's Instagram account.

Ostentatious displays of wealth in the world's fourth-most populous country are frowned upon and often criticised because of its widening income gap. The minimum monthly wage in Jakarta is 4.9 million rupiah (\$327) and the World Bank last year said nearly a tenth of Indonesia's 270 million people still live below the poverty line. Ratnasari is on the payroll of the Indonesian presidential office, local media reported. Indonesian President Joko Widodo told public officials in a March speech not to flaunt their extravagant lives in "improper" ways, including social media posts.

Valentine Cahandra, owner of male dog Jojo, claimed the wedding took place to promote Javanese culture. But angry Indonesians took to social media to condemn the expensive canine nuptials. "It's wasting money and defying God. Common sense has gone, trampled by the desire to show off," one Twitter user posted.

Another wrote: "Unnecessarily wasting their wealth, they should have helped people in need instead." "Is this what we call 'social blindness'?" — AFP



US businessman Paul Kaufmann, who inherited the skull fragments, presumed to be of Ludwig van Beethoven from his great uncle, shows them to journalists at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria, to which he has donated them for further studies.



Lifestyle



An aerial view shows driftwood sitting just off the shoreline on a boneyard beach at Hunting Island State Park in St Helena, South Carolina.



The gated community of Fripp Island can be seen just across from a boneyard beach at Hunting Island State Park in St Helena, South Carolina.



Gullah Geechee fishermen, who are finding it increasingly difficult to compete on the water, pull out their small fishing boat.

Ed Atkins holds a basket filled with small, wriggling shrimp, fresh examples of the catch that the African-American fisherman has drawn from the waters off South Carolina's Saint Helena Island for more than 60 years.

But because of climate change -- and against the steady creep of housing developments -- his way of life on this outlying edge of the Atlantic seaboard is at risk.

"Before, you could go and catch fish anywhere. But now you gotta go to a special place to catch it," the septuagenarian told AFP, standing outside his bait shop's faded blue storefront. In the past he would haul in around \$100 worth of fish on a good day at sea -- now he considers himself lucky if his catch is worth \$35.



A sign protesting a proposal to build a golf course and gated community stands in the yard of a community member in St Helena, South Carolina.

The situation is made all the worse by the fact that fishing is an essential part of his culture -- Atkins belongs to the Gullah Geechee, descendants of African people enslaved on the coastal plantations of the southeastern United States. Isolated on islands scattered along the coast, their ancestors relied on the land and sea. They created their own culture, fed by their African heritage, and even developed their own Creole language.

'Ghost towns'

Hundreds of thousands of people are today part of the community -- which is threatened by climate change, gentrification, and real estate developers circling like hawks. These each have "different effects, but they are culturally deleterious effects," said Dionne Hoskins-Brown, chair of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission.

Gazing over the salt marshes, which she calls her "happy place," the biologist explained how the environment is deteriorating: The heat is more intense, the floods more frequent, the storms more destructive. And, of course, the sea level is rising and disrupting marine species' habitat, which means fishermen no longer catch the same type of fish. This season, the number of blue crabs caught dropped dramatically.

Atkins fears his neighbors will move away because they return home from sea empty-handed, and that one day his beloved Saint Helena Island could become a "ghost town." A fisherman he knows is considering leaving. For the moment, Atkins refuses to let his mind wander to the possibility, but his eyes betray his concern: "I'd be like a fish out of water if I can't go and catch enough fish to feed my family."

Collapsed houses

If residents were to uproot themselves, where would they go? "We're looking at television, seeing mudslides



# Gullah Geechee, descendants of enslaved, fight to protect US island



all over the place, we're seeing forest fires all over the place," said Marquetta Goodwine, a Gullah Geechee activist known as "Queen Quet."

Standing in front of a boat ramp, Goodwine, whose hair is studded with seashells, turns her gaze to a nearby

post that has collapsed due to erosion: "Talk about effects of climate change!" she exclaimed.

A few minutes away on Harbor Island, homes in a private, gated community crumpled as sea rise gobbled the beach. "The houses fell into the

ocean because they were built on a place that was not sustainable," Goodwine said.

"Gullah Geechees don't build directly on the shoreline." She and her neighbors watch anxiously as hotels and large residences are built ever closer to the waves -- by a wealthier population that drives up prices. Some islands have been entirely taken over by tourism, and "you can't even find more than a dozen Gullah Geechees," said Goodwine.

Gates and golf courses

Saint Helena Island is determined to resist such a fate: a local council prohibits construction of certain types of facilities, including large hotel complexes and golf courses.

In the street, between trees weighted down with Spanish moss, signs against gated communities and golf courses can be seen. For many, the struggle against climate change and construction is inseparable. Both threaten the land, which has an almost sacred status.

Past generations "didn't have money to leave us, so what they left was precious land," said resident Marie Gibbs. "Without land you have nothing."

Gibbs, who is in her 70s and is both a farmer and museum manager, has no intention of giving up. Four years ago, she lost 10 acres (four hectares) of cultivable land due to sea water floods that damaged the soil.

Now it's out of the question to lose one inch more, whether to climate change or real estate developers. "The fight is always on," she said. "We're going to fight for what we have." --AFP



Driftwood sits just off the shoreline on a boneyard beach at Hunting Island State Park in St Helena, South Carolina.



A Gullah Geechee man holds up an official flag of the Gullah Geechee people at Station Creek Landing in St Helena, South Carolina.



An old tombstone stands at Warsaw Cemetery in St Helena, South Carolina.



The Hunting Island lighthouse, built in 1859, at Hunting Island State Park in St Helena, South Carolina.



"Queen Quet" Marquetta Goodwine, Chiefess of the Gullah Geechee Nation and official spokesperson, speaks at Club Bridge Creek in St Helena, South Carolina.



Ed Atkins, Gullah Geechee fisherman and owner of Atkins Live Bait, shows his catch of shrimp bait in St Helena, South Carolina.



Driftwood rests on a boneyard beach at Hunting Island State Park in St Helena, South Carolina.



Club Bridge Creek, a small fishing creek that is feeling the effects of climate change, in St Helena, South Carolina.



A snowy egret stands within the salt marsh at Station Creek Landing in St Helena, South Carolina.



## Sports

# McIntosh, Marchand tipped to shine at swimming world championships

## Serial winners Ledecky, Titmus joined by new generation

## News in Brief

### Barcelona introduce Romeu

LOS ANGELES: Barcelona officially presented their latest signing, veteran Oriol Romeu, on Friday as he joined the Spanish giants training for a second day in Los Angeles. The veteran, tapped to fill the midfield void a left by Sergio Busquets's departure for Major League Soccer's Inter Miami, returns from Girona to the club where he launched a career that has also taken him to Chelsea, Valencia, Stuttgart and Southampton. "The emotions and sensations are very nice," Romeu told reporters after club president Joan Laporta introduced him at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, where Barcelona are preparing for their pre-season tour. "Having the chance to return home and continue growing is an intense dream. It's one of the most exciting challenges of my career and the opportunity comes at my best moment," added Romeu, whose signing, which will keep him in Barcelona through 2026, was announced on Tuesday. — AFP

### Gerard takes 4-point lead

LOS ANGELES: Rising talent Ryan Gerard had seven birdies without a bogey to take a four-point lead at the halfway stage of the US PGA Tour Barracuda Championship in Truckee, California, on Friday. Gerard's seven birdies earned him 14 points under the Modified Stableford scoring system that awards points for birdies, eagles and better and deducts points for bogeys and worse. His two-round total of 30 points put him four ahead of Patrick Rodgers, who had seven birdies and three bogeys to amass 11 points. Sweden's Vincent Norrman had an eagle and five birdies with three bogeys, his 12 points taking his two-day tally to 23. Gerard's strong opening—featuring 16 birdies in the first two days—has the 23-year old in position to challenge this weekend for a first US PGA Tour title in his 16th start. — AFP

### Aubameyang seals Marseille deal

MARSEILLE: Chelsea striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has joined Marseille on a three-year contract, the French Ligue 1 club announced Friday. "Come on OM... See you in Marseille," the 34-year-old Gabon international said in a short video released by his new club on social media. Aubameyang scored just three goals in 22 appearances for Chelsea after reuniting with under former manager Thomas Tuchel in a £10.3m (12 million euros) deal from Barcelona last September. Aubameyang had scored 79 goals in 95 appearances under Tuchel at Borussia Dortmund, earning a move to Arsenal in 2018 and finishing as joint top-scorer in the Premier League a year later. But he was stripped of the Arsenal captaincy by Mikel Arteta before being sold to Barcelona just weeks later. Aubameyang scored 13 goals in 23 matches in six months Spain, but was unable to reproduce that form during a season-long stay at Stamford Bridge. — AFP

### Michelsen reaches semis

NEW YORK: American Alex Michelsen continued his breakthrough run at the ATP grass court tournament in Newport, Rhode Island on Friday, downing Mackenzie McDonald to reach his first tour-level semi-final. The 18-year-old Californian, who beat defending champion Maxime Cressy earlier this week, beat McDonald 6-3, 6-3 to line up a final-four clash with veteran John Isner. Michelsen, ranked 190th in the world, dominated on serve in the opening set and closed out the match in one hour and 11 minutes. "I served really well, first-serve percentage was probably pretty high," Michelsen said. "The serve was key today and I didn't miss too many groundstrokes either, so that was nice." Isner, a four-time Newport winner, overcame a slow start to beat 14th-ranked Tommy Paul, the top seed, 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4). At 38, he'll be giving up 20 years to his semi-final opponent, who has committed to playing for the University of Georgia—where Isner graduated in 2007. — AFP

### Leclerc tops Hungary practice

BUDAPEST: Charles Leclerc topped the times for Ferrari ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris in Friday's second free practice for the weekend's Hungarian Grand Prix. In an orderly, if unexceptional session, following the crash and rain-hit opening hour, the Red Bull and Mercedes team opted not to attempt low-fuel high-speed lapping. It meant none of their drivers ended in the top ten of an unfamiliar order. Leclerc clocked a best lap of 1min and 17.686sec to outpace Norris by 0.015sec. Pierre Gasly was third for Alpine ahead of Yuki Tsunoda's Alpha Tauri and Esteban Ocon, in the second Alpine. Nico Hulkenberg was sixth for Haas ahead of Alfa Romeo's Valtteri Bottas. Aston Martin's two-time world champion Fernando Alonso was next, followed by Zhou Guanyu in the second Alfa and Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, who had crashed in the morning session. — AFP

FUKUOKA: With a year to go until the Paris Olympics, swimming's top stars are aiming to make a splash at the world championships starting Sunday in the Japanese city of Fukuoka. Serial winners like American Katie Ledecky and Australian Ariarne Titmus will be joined by a new generation of champions including Canadian teen Summer McIntosh and France's Leon Marchand. But several of the sport's biggest names will not compete for reasons ranging from mental health to sputtering form, with American Caeleb Dressel, Britain's Adam Peaty and Hungary's Kristof Milak all absent.

Fukuoka's hosting of the world championships has been postponed twice because of the COVID pandemic, and comes hot on the heels of an extra edition of the competition in Budapest last year. The next worlds will take place in Doha in February next year, and with the Paris Olympics looming just beyond that, the world's top swimmers are keen to lay down a marker over the coming week.

"I'm loving it and so happy doing this," Australia's Kyle Chalmers, who is expected to battle Romanian star David Popovici for the men's 100m freestyle title, said last month. "I can't wait to get on the world stage." The competition begins with a blockbuster opening night, with Ledecky, Titmus and McIntosh set to do battle in the women's 400m freestyle. Ledecky is the defending world champion and Titmus holds the Olympic crown, but 16-year-old McIntosh threw down the gauntlet by breaking Titmus's world record in March in a time of 3 min, 56.08 sec.

Titmus has added a little spice to the showdown by questioning McIntosh's credentials, suggesting she lacks experience "on the international stage with the big pressure". McIntosh could be one of the stars of the championships, having also claimed the 400m individual medley world record this year, just days after breaking the 400 freestyle mark. Later the same evening, Marchand will compete in the men's 400m individual medley.

He has been tipped to take a serious crack at Mi-

## Three key battles at the swimming world championships

FUKUOKA: Swimming's world championships start in Fukuoka on Sunday. Here, AFP picks out three key battles in the pool.

### Women's 400m freestyle

A battle royale looms in the women's 400m freestyle, with American Katie Ledecky, Australia's Ariarne Titmus and Canada's Summer McIntosh set to square off on the competition's opening day. Ledecky once dominated the event, but Titmus dethroned her as world champion in 2019 and then took her Olympic crown in Tokyo two years later. Now a new contender has emerged, with 16-year-old McIntosh smashing Titmus's world record at the Canadian trials in March with a time of 3min, 56.08sec. Titmus has come closest to matching McIntosh this year, clocking 3:58.47 at the Australian trials last month, while Ledecky has the third-fastest time of 2023 with 3:58.84.

But Titmus believes form will go out the window in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the world championships

## Warholm fires a warning shot

MONACO: Karsten Warholm fired out a warning to contenders for world gold in the men's 400m hurdles in Budapest next month with a stunning marker at the Diamond League meet in Monaco. In hot, humid conditions on Friday, the Norwegian blasted his way to victory in a stunning 46.51sec, his second fastest time over the distance and the fourth fastest ever run. The 27-year-old Olympic champion and world record holder suffered a blip at last year's world championships in Eugene, where he rushed back from a hamstring injury and could only finish seventh in the final.

That allowed Brazil's Alison Dos Santos in for gold, but it would be a brave punter to bet against Warholm claiming a third world title of his own come the Budapest champs between August 19-27. "It was really nice to do this again - that 0.01 sec off the Diamond League record and also the track record, it is really good," said Warholm. "I had a very good warm-up so I was ready to do what I do and to play hard. Conditions were very good, a little wind and warm. So I was just go-

## DR Congo racing for Francophone Games

KINSHASA: With just a week left before the opening ceremonies, workers in Kinshasa are racing to finish facilities ahead of the Francophone Games, gathering nations from the French-speaking equivalent of the Commonwealth. Some 3,000 athletes from about 30 countries are set to arrive in DR Congo's capital over the next few days ahead of the July 28 kickoff. But painters, technicians and other workers are still rushing to prepare venues, and some participants have pulled out due to concerns over facilities and security.

Rehearsals for the opening ceremony have nonetheless begun in the Stade des

ing out hard and my goal is always to fight until the end." Dos Santos, making his season debut in the hurdles in his own comeback from injury, finished a distant second, while American Rai Benjamin was a late withdrawal.

That trio has pushed the boundaries of one-lap hurdling to new heights since topping the podium at the Tokyo Olympics when Warholm won gold in a world record of 45.94sec. "Of course it was important (to beat Dos Santos). I want to show that I'm in a good place before the world champs, but I'm not going to play games," said Warholm. "I'm happy to see him back. I know it's tough to be out with injury, coming to the meeting here when you know he's probably not in his best shape, takes a lot of balls to do that. "Since I was injured last year, I enjoyed the racing more. Now I know how it is to be sitting on the outside of the race."

### 'Perfect opportunity'

Dos Santos added that Monaco had been the "perfect opportunity for me to come back to run". "I am really grateful to be able to run again," said the 23-year-old Brazilian. "Now I will get ready for Budapest, to be able to win my world champion title again!" Warholm, certainly, might have something to say about that statement, not least when he describes his

Martyrs stadium, which AFP toured during a guided visit with journalists and foreign ambassadors on Thursday. "It's a bit last-minute," commented one visitor, who predicted however that the Games would go ahead. Initial fears that the 10-day event will be called off appear to have abated. The DR Congo was chosen in 2019 as host of the ninth Francophone Games, an event held every four years which combines both sport and culture. The Games were originally scheduled to take place in 2021, but were postponed because of the COVID pandemic and were then delayed again last year because the facilities were not ready.



RENNES: French swimmer Leon Marchand competes in the men's 200m medley series during the French swimming championships in this file photo. — AFP

chael Phelps's world record of 4 min, 03.84 sec - a mark which has stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Marchand is likely to be one of the faces of the Paris Olympics, and he and Popovici are expected to provide the stardust in the men's field in Fukuoka in the absence of a host of established names. Butterfly king Milak, who won two golds on home turf last year, withdrew saying he was "neither physically nor mentally in a position to be among the best in the world".

Peaty, an eight-time world champion and three-time Olympic gold medalist in breaststroke, is taking a mental health break after falling into a "self-destructive spiral". Dressel, meanwhile, failed to qualify at the US trials earlier this month. The seven-time Olympic gold medalist pulled out of last year's worlds citing unspecified medical concerns, and his comeback bid came up short in all four events he entered.

Twice Olympic gold-medalist Simone Manuel will skip Fukuoka to concentrate on the Paris Games but the women's field is otherwise strong. Australia's Emma McKeon, who won seven medals at the Tokyo Olympics, will go for more gold in the sprint events. Compatriot Kaylee McKeown will square off against

Americans Regan Versatile and Katharine Berkoff in backstroke, while versatile American Kate Douglass will compete in freestyle, breaststroke and individual medley.

Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan could also make a huge splash, having upset Olympic champion Titmus in the 200m freestyle last month and looking capable of winning other events too. Then there is Ledecky, who is the red-hot favorite to win a record sixth 800m freestyle gold and add to her haul of 22 world championship medals - also a record for a woman. The 26-year-old is also strongly fancied in the 1,500m, a race in which she owns the top 15 fastest times ever.

On the men's side, Australian 200m breaststroke world record holder and world and Olympic champion Zac Stubblety-Cook will look for more glory, while compatriot Cameron McEvoy is aiming to cap a comeback in the 50m freestyle. China will be hoping for a better showing than last year in Budapest, where Yang Junxuan won their only individual gold in the pool, in the women's 200m freestyle. Russia, meanwhile, have again been banned along with Belarus over the war in Ukraine. — AFP

and says McIntosh has it all to prove. "I feel like Summer hasn't really had that experience yet, racing on the international stage with the big pressure, so it'll be interesting to see how she goes," Titmus said last month. McIntosh finished second behind Ledecky at last year's worlds in Budapest, with Titmus skipping the event to concentrate on the Commonwealth Games. Titmus said losing her world record to McIntosh was "a bit of a bee sting", and there will be plenty of buzz surrounding their showdown in Fukuoka.

### Men's 400m individual medley

The biggest challenge to France's Leon Marchand in the 400m individual medley is not likely to come from his rivals but from Michael Phelps's 15-year-old world record. Marchand, who trains under Phelps's former coach Bob Bowman, swam the second-fastest 400 IM of all time at last year's world championships in Budapest, coming home in 4min 04.28sec. That mark was behind only the 4:03.84 set by Phelps at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and Marchand has been in blistering form heading into this year's world championships.

He clocked 4:07.80 at the French national championships last month, and Bowman warned that his new protégé had "not fully peaked" yet. "I'm very happy, because he's not fully prepared for this and he has much more that he can do in every event," said Bowman, who has guided Marchand for the past two years. "This is sort of like training for him." Marchand won a 200-400 IM double at last year's world championships and also took silver in the 200 butterfly. His main rivals for the 400 IM title this year are likely to be Japan's Daiya Seto and Americans Carson Foster and Olympic champion Chase Kalisz. — AFP



MONACO: Karsten Warholm of Norway (left) crosses the finish line ahead of Alison Dos Santos of Brazil (right) in the Men's 400m Hurdles event during the IAAF Diamond League 'Herculis' athletics meeting on July 21, 2023. — AFP

ongoing evolution on the track.

"Running a little bit faster every time is a very good place to be, showing myself that my consistent level is better than ever before," he said. "It also means you get important races in world champs and Olympics and then you have the chance to run even faster. There's one month to go, so I'll get back, work and then we'll see.

"I feel stronger so I can compete in more races, be more consistent at the best level. But the world record still is going to be very difficult." Warholm added that enjoyment—while winning, of course—was now key. "It is very important in this stage of my career. I won everything and I have the record so I have to enjoy it because there is no other reason to do it." — AFP



KINSHASA: African wrestlers train in a stadium under construction at the Tata Raphael stadium in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

Congolese Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula told reporters Thursday that pulling together the finances to host an international sporting event is difficult "when you're a country at war". Armed groups plague much of the east of the vast nation,

a legacy of regional wars that flared in the 1990s and 2000s. One such group, the M23, has captured swathes of territory in North Kivu province since re-emerging from dormancy in late 2021, and displaced over a million people. — AFP



## Sports

# Mbappe out of PSG squad for pre-season Asian tour

## Doubt mounts over France captain's future

PARIS: French champions Paris Saint-Germain on Friday left Kylian Mbappe out of their squad for a pre-season tour of Japan, casting further doubt on the star striker's future. PSG gave no reason for the omission of France's captain. The 29-player squad that flies east on Saturday will include Mbappe's younger brother, 16-year-old Ethan Mbappe, as well as the club's remaining superstar Neymar. Mbappe has been taking part in the club's pre-season preparations and played the last 30 minutes as PSG entertained Le Havre in a training-ground friendly on Friday, scoring a goal.

Mbappe declared in May that he would not extend his PSG contract, which expires next year, but indicated he wanted to remain at the club for a final season. "I still have a year left on my contract and I am going to honor my contract," he said. That would allow him to become a free agent next summer and leave PSG for nothing. PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi reacted by saying earlier this month that Mbappe "must sign a new contract".

"We can't let the best player in the world

today leave for free. It's impossible," Khelaifi said. Khelaifi even gave Mbappe an ultimatum of a "maximum two weeks" to make his decision: sign a new contract or leave this summer. That date corresponds roughly with the departure of the team for Japan. If Mbappe refuses to sign, the club must sell him in this transfer window, otherwise they will likely lose him for nothing when his deal ends after next season.

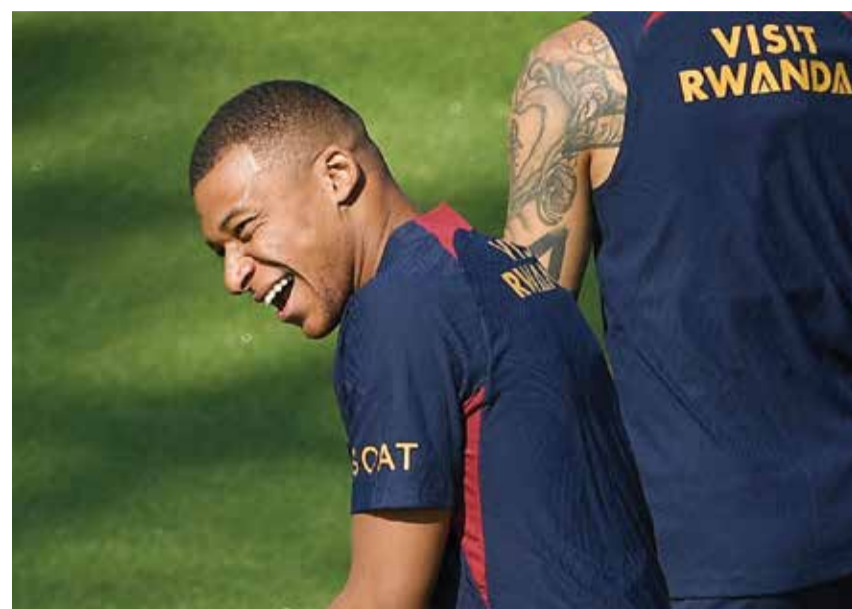
### Madrid bound?

The 24-year-old was expected to leave a year ago for Real Madrid when his previous contract came to an end, only to agree a new deal to remain in Paris. That was a two-year contract with the option of a third season which would take him to 2025, which the player has said he would not take up, even if he has indicated his intention to see out his existing deal. Having missed out on his signature a year ago, Real would again be chief among his suitors.

They are in the market for a new striker after reigning Ballon d'Or Karim Benzema ended his 14-year stay in the Spanish capi-

tal, opting to move to Saudi Arabia. Recently named as the new France captain, Mbappe was still a teenager when he joined PSG on a season-long loan from Monaco in August 2017, just after helping the principality club win the Ligue 1 title. The move turned into a permanent transfer the following year in a 180-million-euro (\$196m) deal. He helped France to World Cup glory in 2018 and has established himself as arguably the leading forward on the global stage.

Mbappe also scored a hat-trick in France's 2022 World Cup final defeat to Lionel Messi's Argentina before helping PSG win a record 11th French title. He was the top scorer in Ligue 1 last season with 29 goals and netted 41 in 43 games for his club in all competitions. PSG are under new management, with Luis Enrique as coach. Their Asian tour opens against Cristiano Ronaldo's club Al-Nassr of Saudi Arabia in Osaka, on July 25. PSG then play Cerezo Osaka, also in Osaka, and Inter Milan in Tokyo before finishing off the tour in Busan, South Korea, against Jeonbuk Motors on August 3. — AFP



POISSY: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe reacts as he takes part in a training session at the new 'campus' of French L1 Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) football club, ahead of the club's Japan tour. — AFP

## Barca teen Dragoni face of new era at World Cup for Italy

MILAN: The World Cup marks the dawn of a new era for Italy's women with teenage Barcelona midfielder Giulia Dragoni the exciting face of a fresh chapter. Long-time captain Sara Gama, 34, was left out of Milena Bertolini's squad as the Italy coach made space for emerging talent. Dragoni booked her spot on the plane to Australia and New Zealand after impressing on her debut aged 16 as a substitute in a recent goalless draw with Morocco.

The youngster is unlikely to start against Argentina when Italy begin their World Cup campaign on Monday in Auckland, given the stiff competition in a midfield led by Manuela Giugliano. But Dragoni could well play a part at the tournament as Italy try to show that they are better than their dismal display at Euro 2022. Italy surprised by reaching the quarter-finals of the last World Cup - their first for two decades - but finished bottom of their group with one point at the Euro in England.

Dragoni was picked alongside another young talent in Fiorentina's Emma Severini, in a squad which features 15 players from Juventus and newly crowned Italian champions Roma. Dragoni, who played in mixed-sex football until she was 13 and earned the nickname "Little Messi", is a star in the making. After leaving Inter Milan in January she scored four goals in 10 appearances as Barcelona's B team won the second-tier title, while also being part of the first-team squad which won the Champions League.

"Since September we've begun to try out new things and bring in new players," said Bertolini. "We don't want to be restricted to just one style of play because the team needs to be able to adapt depending on who they are facing." Italy's current standing in the women's game is reflected in Bertolini's stated objective for the World Cup - to get out of a group which also contains Sweden and South Africa and see how things go from there.

### Exceeding expectations

Italian women's football has come a long way in



Giulia Dragoni

the six years since Bertolini took charge of the national team but the country still lags behind European rivals England, Germany, France and Spain, never mind reigning world champions the United States. One of the keys to Italy's climb up to 16th in the world rankings was Gama, but she was dropped last month, her time as captain and spiritual leader of the national team seemingly over.

Gama has been more than just an important player over her 126 appearances for Italy - she pushed to get her country to take women's football seriously. She is vice-president of the Italian footballers' association, qualified to work as a sporting director and a cultured presence capable of changing perceptions. Before Italy reached the last eight of the last World Cup, women's football was entirely amateur and either ignored or derided by the general public.

But exceeding expectations at France 2019, thanks largely to a backline led by Gama not conceding in open play, led to an audience with Italian president Sergio Mattarella and the women's Serie A turning professional. Gama's removal from the squad angered the veteran centre-back but Bertolini insists that Italy are ready to move on with the next generation. "There are young players who are developing and I believe there are players who are better suited to the type of football that I would like to take to the World Cup," said Bertolini. — AFP



Germany's forward Alexandra Popp

## German great Popp chases WCup glory

BERLIN: Germany captain Alexandra Popp will hope there is no repeat of her injury curse when she attempts to crown a towering career with Women's World Cup glory. The 32-year-old is one of the biggest stars in German sport having won every prize at club level, including two Champions Leagues with Wolfsburg. She won Olympic gold with Germany in 2016, but Popp's international career has often seemed to have been cursed, like when she missed the country's triumphant 2013 Euros campaign with an ankle injury.

She missed Euro 2017 with a knee issue and was then heartbreakingly ruled out in the warm-up ahead of last year's Euro final against England due to injury, having scored in every one of Germany's five matches up to that point. Germany lost 2-1 in extra time at Wembley, with a forlorn Popp watching from the stands. Despite the injury setbacks Popp has scored 62 goals in 128 appearances for Germany, her standing rising alongside that of women's football in the country. Germany, one of the favorites to win the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, begin their campaign on Monday against Morocco in Melbourne.

### Zookeeper goal-poacher

Popp has never been afraid to do things a bit differently. Despite being a self-declared fan of Borussia Dortmund, she attended the prestigious Gesamtschule Berger Feld in Gelsenkirchen, the home of their arch-rivals Schalke. Popp was the school's only female pupil and needed a special permit to attend.

Mesut Ozil, Manuel Neuer, Julian Draxler and Joel Matip, all of whom played in the Royal Blue of Schalke, are among Berger Feld's other graduates. Alongside her football education, Popp did a one-year physiotherapy internship before completing a three-year zookeeping apprenticeship. Popp made her Bundesliga debut with Duisburg in 2008, having turned down French giants Lyon, and won the UEFA Women's Cup—precursor to the Champions League—in her first season.

## Kuwaiti wins silver in Karate championship



Kuwaiti karateka receives the medal.

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwaiti karateka Mohammed Hussein won the silver medal in the Asian Karate Federation (AFK) Senior Championships, held in Malaysia. According to AFK on Saturday, Hussein competed against a Japanese karateka on Friday

in the solo Kata category, adding that the Japanese opponent won the gold medal by a 3.42 to 2.42. Melaka city is hosting the 19th edition of the tournament from 21 to 23 July, with the participation of 400 athletes from 31 countries. — KUNA

## Australia A-League club Perth Glory go into receivership

PERTH: Australian A-League side Perth Glory was placed into receivership Saturday after the long-term owner said he could no longer fund the club, partly blaming the Women's World Cup. The development came just days after the team hosted English Premiership side West Ham, crashing 6-2. Danny Townsend, head of the Australian Professional Leagues, the A-League's governing body, said operations would continue as usual in preparation for the 2023-24 season, with the hunt for a buyer under way.

"Here we have a process which allows for the club's operations to continue 'business-as-usual', whilst the technical adjustments are made to the club's ownership structure," he said in a statement. According to reports, Perth Glory player and staff wages had been paid for

the past five months by loans secured from the APL.

The wage payments reportedly amounted to around Aus\$5 million (US\$3.36 million), but recently APL issued owner Tony Sage with a breach notice and the receivers were called in. Local businessman Sage took full ownership of the club in 2008, with the men's team winning the 2019 Premiership and reaching two Grand Finals. The women's team won the 2014 Premiership and competed in three Grand Finals. He said in a statement that keeping the club afloat had taken a "huge emotional and financial" toll, with his family investing millions of dollars.

"This investment was increased greatly and unsustainably by the impact of COVID-19 which decimated the club's income streams," he said. "(It was) then further compounded by our forced relocation from HBF Park last season for 10 of 13 home games while upgrades were made to enable the stadium to host upcoming matches in the FIFA Women's World Cup. "We are still in talks about compensation with the WA government and trust they see the financial damage the relocation caused the club, especially after the two COVID-ravaged seasons." — AFP

## NFL confirms sale of Commanders to Harris group

WASHINGTON: Dan Snyder's controversial tenure as owner of the Washington Commanders ended Thursday as NFL clubs unanimously approved the sale of the team to a group led by private equity investor Josh Harris. "NFL clubs today unanimously approved the sale of the Washington Commanders to Josh Harris and his limited partners at a special league meeting in Minneapolis," the National Football League said in a statement. The investment group led by Harris, which also includes NBA legend Magic Johnson, is paying \$6.05 billion, a record for a North American sports franchise, ESPN reported.

Snyder's departure comes with a final sanction, the NFL also announcing Thursday that he will pay the league \$60 million after an investigation led by former prosecutor Mary Jo White substantiated allegations of misconduct and financial improprieties made by former employees of the club. The league said the payment would be made "in resolution of

Ms. White's findings and all outstanding matters." Snyder had been majority owner of the Commanders since 1999 and his family became sole owners after he bought out his limited partners two years ago.

Harris, co-owner of the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers and NHL's New Jersey Devils and a partner in English Premier League side Crystal Palace, is an asset management firm executive who grew up in suburban Washington. Harris reached an agreement to purchase the club on May 12, but the vote by owners was delayed as financial details that kept the deal in line with NFL requirements were worked out. "Congratulations to Josh Harris and his impressive group of partners," league commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement.

"Josh will be a great addition to the NFL. He has a remarkable record in business, sports, and in his communities," he added. "The diverse group that Josh has put together is outstanding for its business acumen and strong Washington ties and we welcome them to the NFL as well." Snyder has been targeted by multiple investigations in recent years. A US congressional probe found that he "permitted and participated in" a troubling toxic workplace culture for decades, with the NFL failing to protect workers from sexual misconduct. — AFP



## England labor to victory; US, Japan showcase credentials

### Japan crush Zambia 5-0 in Women's World Cup lesson



AUCKLAND: Vietnam's goalkeeper #14 Thi Kim Thanh Tran stops a penalty by USA's forward #13 Alex Morgan during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group E football match between the United States and Vietnam in Auckland on July 22, 2023. — AFP

BRISBANE: England squeezed past Haiti 1-0 as they began their Women's World Cup title bid in unconvincing fashion on Saturday, but holders the United States and former champions Japan were far more comfortable. European champions England have been touted as the prime challengers to a United States team chasing an unprecedented third World Cup crown in a row.

But they will have to do far better than the display they put on in front of nearly 45,000 spectators in Brisbane, where a Haiti side making their World Cup debut could have snatched a point at the end. A Georgia Stanway penalty in the first half put Sarina Wiegman's side ahead, but despite having more of the ball and more shots, England had goalkeeper Mary Earps to thank for preserving their narrow lead.

She made a superb save with her left leg as the time ticked down after Roseline Eloissaint found herself all alone with only Earps to beat. England, who have been embroiled in a dispute with the FA over

bonuses in the lead-up to the tournament, are aiming to add the World Cup to the European crown they won at Wembley last year. China and Denmark, the other teams in the group, were to meet in the final match of a bumper day of four games on Saturday.

#### Super Smith

In contrast to England's labored performance, the United States and Japan were rampant against other supposed minnows. The United States cruised to a 3-0 win over Vietnam - it should have been many more - before Japan crushed Zambia 5-0. Sophia Smith was the star of the show for the US team at Eden Park in Auckland, scoring twice and setting up captain Lindsey Horan for the third in front of just over 41,000 fans. The only sour note for Vlatko Andonovski's side, which featured six World Cup debutants at kick-off, was that they were not more ruthless in front of the goal.

They had 27 attempts to none for Vietnam and

Alex Morgan missed a penalty. "At the end, I just felt we needed to be a little bit better with the final shot," said the coach. "We created opportunities, we had a penalty kick, obviously enough to score a few more goals, but there are lots of positives from game one going into game two." Next up for the Americans, who brought veteran Megan Rapinoe off the bench for the last 30 minutes, are the Netherlands in a re-run of the 2019 final. The US won that game 2-0 to retain their title.

#### 'No excuses'

Japan are not seen as the threat they were in 2011, when they went on to lift the World Cup, but they were much too good for Zambia. Zambia are the lowest-ranked team at the World Cup and they were on the back foot for long periods against a Japan team who looked like scoring every time they went forward.

Much like the US against Vietnam, the scoreline

actually flattered the losers and Zambia could easily have lost by more in front of 16,111 spectators in the New Zealand city of Hamilton. Hinata Miyazawa scored twice and Mina Tanaka, Jun Endo and Riko Ueki were also on the scoresheet as Japan joined Spain on three points in Group C. Spain, another of the pre-tournament favorites, cruised to a 3-0 win over Costa Rica on Friday.

To cap a disastrous day for Zambia, goalkeeper Catherine Musonda was sent off at the death for a second yellow card and conceded a penalty, which Ueki slotted in at the second attempt. "We're not looking at excuses - we have just not played well this evening," said Zambia's coach Bruce Mwape. Title contenders Sweden, France and the Netherlands - who face Portugal before taking on the USA on Thursday - all play on Sunday. Off the pitch, New Zealand's squad was temporarily evacuated from its hotel in Auckland after a fire, the team said, but all players and staff were safe. — AFP

## Morocco women set for World Cup debut

CASABLANCA: Months after the men's groundbreaking run to the semi-finals in Qatar, Morocco's women will make World Cup history of their own on Monday. When the Atlas Lionesses face two-times former champions Germany in Melbourne they will be the first Arab team to play at a Women's World Cup. It has not gone unnoticed in a country mad about football and still buzzing from what their men did at the Qatar World Cup in December. "They will do just as well as the men," said 14-year-old Rabab Tougha after a training session at the football school of the local club in the Casablanca neighborhood of Avadas.

It is her ambition to play the sport internationally, "especially after what the Atlas Lionesses have done". Morocco's women enjoyed a surprise run to the final of last year's Africa Cup of Nations, which they hosted, before losing 2-1 to South Africa in front of over 50,000 spectators in Rabat. That was followed by the men's remarkable performance in Qatar when they became the first African and first Arab team to reach the semi-finals of the World Cup, where they lost to France.

Those performances have encouraged girls to take up football and the number of players registered at the Ava-

das academy—for youths who often come from underprivileged families—has increased to more than 50 from about 10 a year ago. "The girls are motivated and want to learn how to play football" after seeing the success of the men's and women's national teams, coach Mohamed Jidi told AFP. "We can see the impact. We had a girl who played rugby, others who played basketball or did athletics. But then they all wanted to start playing football because they decided there was a future in it."

Morocco are in Group H at the Women's World Cup and as well as Germany will face South Korea and Colombia. They are one of the lowest-ranked teams in Australia and New Zealand and it would be a surprise if they get out of the group, but captain Ghizlane Chebbak knows the men have raised expectations. "Moroccan fans have that passion, as do us players, and we will give everything to make them satisfied," she told FIFA.com. "The men have shown us that nothing is impossible if you fight for it and you stay focused," she added.

That women's football is growing in popularity in Morocco is thanks to a development strategy put in place in 2020. "The federation invested in women's football. Since then, mentalities have changed and the interest and evolution are palpable," Khadija Illa, president of the Moroccan women's league, told AFP. In 2021, the North African kingdom set up a two-division professional women's league with 42 clubs, each of which committed to also launching teams at Under-17 and Under-15 level. — AFP

## Messi makes magical start to Miami career

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi made a Hollywood start to his American adventure, scoring a last-second winner with a curling free-kick in his debut game for Inter Miami on Friday. Deep in the fourth minute of stoppage time, with the Leagues Cup match against Mexican club Cruz Azul standing at 1-1, Messi won a free-kick just outside the box, in perfect range for his famous left foot. The script had been written and Messi delivered his line perfectly.

The seven-times Ballon d'Or winner took a glance at the position of Cruz Azul goalkeeper Andres Gudiño, then put his head down before curling his shot high to the keeper's right and into the top corner to deliver the 2-1 triumph. The capacity 20,000 crowd at Miami's DRV PNK Stadium went wild, with some fans running on to the field before being apprehended by security. Smoke bombs in Miami's trademark pink went off in the area behind the goal, occupied by the team's most passionate supporters.

"We wanted to start like this by giving these people a victory," said Messi. "We knew that it was very important for us to start this championship in winning fashion and luckily we were able to do it in the end, and I am very happy," he added. Miami are rock bottom of Major League Soccer and without a win in 11 games in league play, so Messi said the victory was sorely needed. "It is a huge joy to get this first victory after how we have done in the league," he said. "It is important to start winning, beyond the fact that it is another championship, for confidence it is very good to get victories."

Miami and Major League Soccer hope that the arrival of the Argentine World Cup winner and all-time great will transform the sport and push it into the American mainstream. If Messi's debut was any guide, the former Barcelona star still has plenty to offer. Even before his wonderful goal he had looked sharp and alert, his touch belying the fact that until



FLORIDA: A wall of Cruz Azul players attempt to block a shot from Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi during the Leagues Cup Group J football match between Inter Miami CF and Cruz Azul on July 21, 2023. — AFP

little over a week ago he was vacationing on a Caribbean beach with his family.

Sergio Busquets, the Spanish midfielder and former Barca team-mate, who has joined Messi for his American adventure, also made a strong impression after they both entered the contest in the 54th minute as part of a triple change with Venezuelan Josef Martinez. Busquets showed his famous, almost telepathic understanding with Messi remains, after over two years apart from each other, with the midfielder delivering pieces from all angles into the Argentine's feet. But it was Messi's magical finish that will remain long in the memories of Inter Miami fans.

He also made sure that the club's co-owner David Beckham had a broad grin at the final whistle. "To be honest, as soon as I saw the free kick given I thought this is the way it's meant to end. Especially when you've got players like Leo and Sergio on the pitch, that's what they produce," said the former England midfielder. "It's so exciting tonight for our fans. All of these people that come down here to see Leo just step onto the pitch, let alone just do what he's done. It's a dream come true for everyone in this stadium to see. "It's such a moment for this country, such a moment for this league," he said. — AFP



SALE: Morocco Women's national football team players attend a training session in the city of Sale. — AFP