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MP files to grill minister Bugammaz

Cabinet backs public works minister

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Dawood Maarafi filed to grill the Minister of Public Works Amani Bugammaz on Tuesday over the alleged squandering of public funds and administrative corruption of the ministry and its affiliated roads authority. The lawmaker said after handing over a copy of his grilling, which contained a number of allegations against the minister, that he filed the grilling over a "number of violations and administrative corruption".

Maarafi accused the minister of squandering public funds, failure to apply the law regarding the roads authority, which comes under the minister, and also failing to conduct

the ministry's work. Last week, MP Mubarak Al-Tasha filed to grill the minister over alleged violations and a plan to award road repair contracts to foreign companies at highly inflated prices. The Council of Ministers expressed its total support for the minister.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly's public works committee has urged Minister of Public Works Amani Bugammaz during a meeting to accelerate plans to repair roads in Kuwait ahead of the rainy season, the head of the panel said. MP Ahmad Lari said the minister and his team made a presentation about roads that were damaged during heavy rains in the last season and the process of awarding contracts to foreign companies

to repair those roads while negotiating the right price. The minister explained the issue concerning several contracts that will be awarded to companies amid allegations that they have bid highly inflated prices. MP Lari said the presentation described some roads as high-risk roads that should be repaired as soon as possible.

Also, MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf has sent a series of questions to Minister of Electricity and Water Jassem Al-Ostad over the possibility that Kuwait could face a shortage in power supplies in 2025. He asked the minister if this is true and what the ministry's preparations are. The lawmaker asked the minister if manufacturers of turbines and transformers have delayed the delivery

to Kuwait by three years from now, adding that there are reports that four power plants, including the one in Subbiya, will not come online on time. He asked the minister if this was true.

In another series of questions, the lawmaker asked Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah about the ministry's response to a ruling by the Iraqi Federal Court annulling an agreement to regulate the navigation line between Kuwait and Iraq in Khor Abdullah. The Federal Court said last month that the ratification of the agreement by the Iraqi parliament was unconstitutional and scrapped the agreement. MP Mudhaf asked the minister about the legal measure the ministry plans to take against the Iraqi court ruling.

EU supports Kuwait territorial integrity

BRUSSELS: EU High Representative Josep Borrell said Tuesday that the 27-member bloc is ready to help and support the territorial integrity of Kuwait. "We are also following with the greatest attention the ruling by the Iraqi Supreme Federal Court on the 2012 maritime agreement with Kuwait. I had the opportunity to discuss that with my Kuwaiti fellow minister (Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah)," he said, in his opening speech to the EU-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Joint Council and Ministerial meeting in Muscat, Oman.

"Both Kuwait and Iraq are privileged EU partners, and we want to see the issue solved, and we stand ready to help and support the territorial integrity of Kuwait," he said. Borrell's speech was carried live by the EU's audiovisual service, EBS. Referring to the current dramatic situation in Palestine, the EU's foreign policy chief said, "The priority now is to stop the violence, to de-escalate, to protect civilians and to release all hostages."

He noted that together with the Arab League, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, "we started a joint initiative to help revitalize the two-state solution." This tragic event in Palestine is a wake-up call for the international community to engage to find a solution. The support of our friends in stopping violence is vital, he said. After the EU adopted the strategy for the Gulf last year, Borrell said, "We Europeans are here today to take stock of the progress made in our cooperation, but mostly to commit to working together in more strategic areas." The EU is ready to support regional-led efforts to support the security challenges in the Gulf, he added. — KUNA



MUSCAT: Top officials take a group photo after the 27th EU-GCC joint ministerial meeting in Muscat, Oman. — KUNA

PM in UK to boost diplomatic efforts

LONDON: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is in the UK to follow up on the outcomes of His Highness the Crown Prince Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to the United Kingdom and the investment partnership agreement, which will contribute to creating added value for Kuwaiti foreign investments and provide job opportunities.

His Highness the Prime Minister visited the Kuwait Embassy in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland in London on Tuesday, where he met with embassy officials. His Highness was briefed on the embassy's mechanisms for communication with citizens to facilitate their affairs and resolve their issues, in addition to the embassy's diplomatic efforts to strengthen the country's bilateral relations with the United Kingdom in various fields. The meeting was attended by the Director of the Office of the Prime Minister Hamad Bader Al-Amer. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visits Embassy of Kuwait in United Kingdom. — KUNA

'Breaking Barriers' conference explores diversity, inclusion

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: On the second day of National Leadership Institute (NLI) conference, titled "Breaking Barriers", diversity and women in leadership were topics of discussion. The conference, which was sponsored by Kuwait Times and Zain, took place in Grand Hyatt hotel on Tuesday, Oct 10, 2023. Experts with extensive experience working with top organizations worldwide such as Sara Sabry, the first Egyptian astronaut and the first Arab woman from the African continent to go to space, and Jo Malone, the founder of Jo Malone London, were invited to give a speech on diversity, women in leadership and inclusion in the workplace. — (See Page 3)



KUWAIT: Speakers discuss on the second day of National Leadership Institute (NLI) conference titled 'Breaking Barriers' on Oct 10, 2023. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat.

Braving bombs, KRCS team assists Gazans

KUWAIT: A team of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) is currently distributing food supplies and daily meals to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in spite of intensive bombardment of Gaza City and regions in the enclave, the association announced on Tuesday. KRCS Secretary-General Maha Al-Barjas expressed her keenness to support the Palestinian people in the current tragic conditions caused by the Zionist occupation's aggression.

Al-Barjas said that KRCS teams have distributed food supplies and daily meals to Palestinians who fled their homes and took refuge at shelters. She has affirmed that the KRCS teams are currently in Gaza, where there has been intensive bombardment, and there have been contacts with them to determine further urgent medical and food needs for the Gazans.

In coordination with the Egyptian Red Crescent, a convoy of relief and medical supplies was prepared to relieve the brothers in Gaza, she said, affirming that the association would also aid Gazans who suffered losses as a result of the Zionist aggression. — KUNA



GAZA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) team distributes food supplies and daily meals to Palestinians in Gaza. — KUNA photos



Local

World Mental Health Day celebrates psychological wellbeing, self-care

‘Mental health is a universal human right’

KUWAIT: Much like visiting the doctor to treat physical ailments, psychotherapy provides individuals with ways to preserve their mental health and handle the pressures of life, making them more productive and functional in society. As the globe celebrates World Mental Health Day on October 10th, it is very important to spread awareness and highlight mental health for the betterment of people.

Speaking on the issue with KUNA, a number of medical experts highlighted the importance of seeking help for psychological illnesses. Having stable upbringings and inner peace are keys to becoming vital members of society, said Dr Khlood Al-Ali, head of Kuwait's Center for Mental Health. This year's celebration of World Mental Health Day is held under the theme "mental health is a universal human right", revealed the medical expert, adding that mental disorders must be addressed to find the root causes of various problems facing individuals, which is a right for every human being.

Whether the psychological ailments were caused by social, economic, political, or environmental reasons, people need to be able to find solutions for their traumas, she added. Dr Al-Ali said that treatment was essential, but there should be more programs provided to individuals or groups to enhance mental health in Kuwait and bolster psychological



Dr Abdullah Guloom



Dr Khlood Al-Ali

defensive walls. She stressed that it was important to establish solid psychological foundations for families, saying that it was the first step to raising well-balanced children and individuals.

Here at the Kuwait Center for Mental Health, experts provide diagnosis and various treatment protocols to help people overcome their hardships, Dr Al-Ali affirmed, pointing out that the center also works with other entities to provide social services and leisure activities for clients and patients. She indicated that the center had launched the Al-Manara (lighthouse) center for children and

teenagers mental health, touting this facility as the first of its kind in the GCC region. On the subject of mental disorders, Dr Abdullah Guloom—a psychological consultant—said that such disorders came in many shapes and forms.

He pointed out that the disorders were caused by emotional and behavioral traumas during individuals' daily, professional, and social interactions. Some disorders might include genetic causes, he revealed; however, the main culprits were daily life pressures and shocks that drive people towards mental instability. People must pursue all venues to reach a balanced psyche, and this could be achieved via a system that starts with a person waking up for his or her day until it is time to rest and sleep, Dr Guloom affirmed.

The most common disorder is depression, said the expert, noting that various and numerous studies showed that only around 40 percent sought treatment for this particular ailment. He noted that depression could happen to anyone regardless of status or circumstances, stressing that it was important to seek help once being hit by this crippling feeling that might lead to disaster or, in some cases, suicide.

Dr Guloom also mentioned that anxiety is also a troubling mental disorder that drives individuals to obsessively think of matters that are trivial and do



not deserve all the worry and depletion of physical and psychological health. In contrast, a panic attack is a serious case of physical and psychological symptoms that could occur without notice, causing severe fear, the pulsating of the heart, heavy breathing, and other alarming behaviors.

Post-panic attacks, those who suffer from this particular disorder would tend to feel that their lives were in danger, and this goes especially for those who witnessed fantastical circumstances caused by war and natural disasters, said Dr Guloom, who called for improving health services in Kuwait to better address mental disorders and ways of treatment. He also called on all sectors of society to support mental health services and cadres to build a society of functioning and highly productive individuals. — KUNA

News in Brief



Interior Minister meets with the assistant undersecretaries. — KUNA

Police urged to deal with security issues

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah ordered the police force on Tuesday to spread out and deal with any security situation throughout the country. This came during the minister's meeting with his assistant undersecretaries to discuss the latest security developments in the country. During the meeting, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled expressed his appreciation for all ministry sectors for their efforts. He also encouraged employees to continue their hard work and dedication. — KUNA

MoH and Canada University Health Network discuss ties

KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary for External Health Services Affairs at the Ministry of Health (MoH), Dr Hisham Kelendar, discussed with the Board of Directors of the University Health Network (UHN) in Toronto, Canada, various areas of cooperation in patient care and investment in the Kuwaiti health care sector. The ministry said in a press statement on Tuesday that the visit included discussing international medical expertise in Kuwait and raising the efficiency of the local workforce through joint training with major international health institutions. UHN, affiliated with the University of Toronto, is the largest health research organization in Canada and is a network of research and teaching hospitals that was chosen as the best research hospital in Canada during the period from 2015–22, it explained. UHN encompasses three main hospitals: Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Western Hospital, and Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, in addition to the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute and the Michener Institute. — KUNA

Kuwait hands women leadership to Lebanon

BEIRUT: Kuwait handed over the chairmanship of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Committee on Women to Lebanon on Tuesday for the eleventh session. The eleventh session of the Committee on Women opening session was held at the ESCWA headquarters in Beirut and will last for two days, with participation from Kuwait and other Arab countries. Representative of Kuwait, Chair of the 10th session of the Committee on Women Maryam Al-Azmi told KUNA that Kuwait had worked with the ESCWA executive secretariat on legislative reforms for women's economic empowerment in the Arab region. The eleventh session of the Committee on Women tackled the theme of women's economic empowerment as a catalyst for prosperous national economies and means to boost such empowerment through enacting legal reforms, improving transport systems and addressing sexual harassment. The session will also discuss means of ensuring greater access to land, property, and immovable assets, advancing care policies and making social protection systems more inclusive. — KUNA



Kuwait Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi speaks during the event. — KUNA photos

3 doctors win Kuwait's Prize

CAIRO: Three doctors won the 2023 Kuwait's Prize for cancer control, cardiovascular and diabetes diseases in the Middle East region, said Kuwaiti Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi on Tuesday. This came in Dr Al-Awadhi's speech during the World Health Organization's regional meeting for the Eastern Mediterranean held in Cairo. The award winners are Dr Randa Hamadeh (Bahrain); Dr Aref Al-Nouryani (UAE) and Dr Afshin Astover (Iran).

The minister affirmed that the celebration confirms Kuwait's commitment to encouraging and sponsoring research, innovations and initiatives to combat cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Further, Dr Al-Awadhi stressed that



Health Minister hands Kuwait's Prize to Dr Aref Al-Nouryani

this prestigious award represents an exceptional achievement and commitment to human health and well-being in the Middle East, adding that there are still challenges in the field of combating cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes



Health Minister hands Kuwait's Prize to Dr Afshin Astovar.



Health Minister hands Kuwait's Prize to Dr Randa Hamadeh

that affect the lives of many people. Minister Al-Awadhi heads the Kuwaiti delegation to the regional meeting of the World Health Organization for the Eastern Mediterranean Region in its 70th session. — KUNA



'Al-Sadu Street' project took six months to create a new contemporary landmark. — KUNA photos



'Al-Sadu Street' project includes a round about decorated as 'Sadu'.



Al-Sadu reflects the national identity.

'Al-Sadu' project mirrors Kuwait's traditional craft

KUWAIT: Al-Sadu Society launched the "Al-Sadu Street" project on Tuesday. The project was supported by Kuwait's political leadership. It took six months to create the new contemporary landmark. The project reflects the national identity in a new and innovative way. It used sustainable methods that document the hard work over the many years in which society has worked to preserve, develop, and transfer this heritage craft to new generations.

The society said in a press release Tuesday that the goal of the project is to document the cultural heritage and present it in a new, contemporary form to be a point of creativity and innovation that documents the association's ability to develop this craft while preserving its meanings. It said that the street, which was chosen in a place that is in the heart of several cultural centers, will constitute an addition to that cultural area.

Al-Sadu Society explained that the patterns and motifs of the street were inspired by Sadu pieces from the permanent collection of the Sadu Association, with their artistic designs being a contemporary landmark inspired by heritage. This was done through the use of graphic design to implement their vision of the necessity of reviving the cultural heritage and the values,



The street is made with artistic designs to be a contemporary landmark inspired by heritage.

arts, and customs it contains, inherited over the years, and benefiting from them in a contemporary and creative outcome, it added.

It was explained that a graphic structure was created for the street to shape the Sadu motifs to match the shape and size of the bricks that were used for the project, which took 300 working hours from March to September. The street consisted of 190,000 Kuwaiti-made multi-purpose bricks in colors that match the Sadu motifs, which took two weeks to make from the time of ordering, and all the materials used in the Al-Sadu street were made locally in Kuwait with the assistance of Kuwaiti engineers from the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Electricity and Water.

The society extends its sincere gratitude to the political leadership for its support and encouragement to implement this artistic and cultural project and appreciates the cooperation of the participating

ministries and government agencies, represented by the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Interior, and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation. — KUNA



Breaking Barriers conference explores diversity and inclusion in workplace

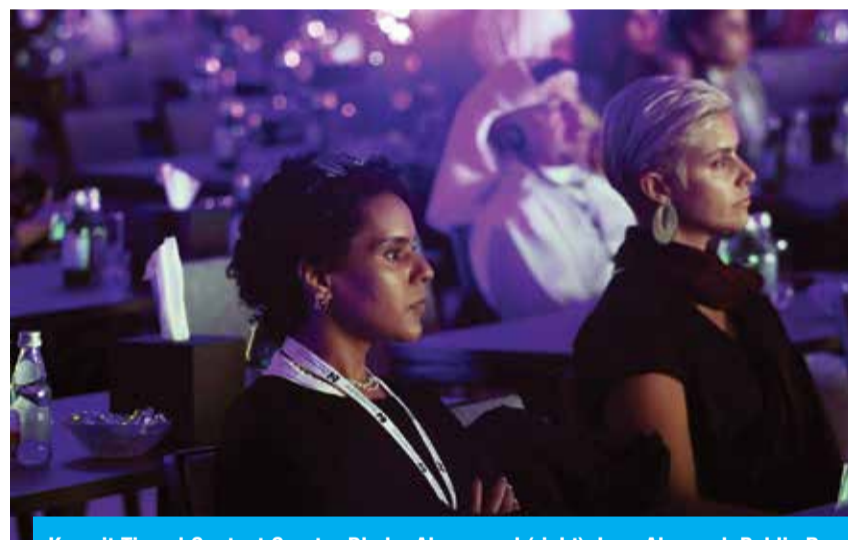
Women leaders share journey to success, overcoming challenges



Panel discussion moderated by Besma Al-Qassar. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Participants listen during the National Leadership Institute (NLI) conference.



Kuwait Times' Content Creator Dhoha Alessa and (right) Jana Alnaqeeb Public Relations and CSR Manager of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News during the conference.



Besma Al-Qassar

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: On the second day of National Leadership Institute (NLI) conference, titled "Breaking Barriers", diversity and women in leadership were topics of discussion. The conference, which was sponsored by Kuwait Times and Zain, took place in Grand Hyatt hotel on Tuesday, Oct 10, 2023. Experts with extensive experience working with top organizations worldwide such as Sara Sabry, the first Egyptian astronaut and the first Arab woman from the African continent to go to space, and Jo Malone, the founder of Jo Malone London, were invited to give a speech on diversity, women in leadership and inclusion in the workplace.

Sabry spoke about using life's obstacles as fuel as she shared with the audience her journey and determination to become an astronaut despite the obstacles and negative comments. Whereas Malone spoke about the art of entrepreneurship and the means to success by emphasizing on creativity and how she intends to change the way the world wears fragrance.



Imtiaz Murshed

The conference also included workshops and a panel discussion that was moderated by certified trainer and business coach Besma Al-Qassar.

At the event, Kuwait Times spoke to Imtiaz Murshed, the acting CEO of NEST, a Kuwaiti national company for educational services and training. "Our core mandate is to transfer knowledge into Kuwait. We have to work across the full value chain of education, and this is why we are developing the new company, NEST. We called it NEST to set the right foundation and base. Our plan is to develop a school, a special needs school, vocational training centers, and we are working on academies — a digital academy as well as an aviation academy. We are looking forward to developing a national aviation center," Murshed said.

He added that NEST is working on establishing a university. "We have already got an application with the private university council, which we are hoping to get approved and finalized soon," Murshed said. NEST's long-term vision, he said, is the "full-value chain and of course the final bit of our chain is NLI, which is all about executive development and continuous learning."

Murshed explained the value of continuous learning: "Even someone who is just coming into a new company, they need skills to become a contributing part within the organization. We also believe that continuous learning is the most important thing about any organization or individual development. Hence, throughout the journey of their career there always have to be additional new skills."

Murshed also spoke about NEST's programs for



Sara Sabry



Waleed Al-Khashti



Jo Malone

companies. "Next year we are calling it 24 for 24 — based on 24 programs that we deliver over the year of 2024, and these include: soft skills, mentoring, coaching, wellness, managing and leadership. Because someone might have great technical skills but cannot be a great leader. And sometimes a great leader might have no technical skills. So, this is where want to be. (We hope) to give the people with technical talents the tools that help them become a better person and a better manager, and hopefully a better innovator within their position. This is where diversity and inclusion are most important," he said.

Based on a survey NEST did with the top companies in Kuwait last year, diversity, inclusion and

digital transformation were the core values that organizations struggled with, said Murshed. "Hence why NLI is breaking barriers to help organizations move forward. The conference was the first step to promote our programs for next year. To give every company the opportunity to choose what program is relevant to their needs. We work as a partner not as supplier, and this is why we are becoming a core value for their organization because their success is our success," he added.

Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti told Kuwait Times: "We are happy to announce our role as the primary sponsor for the esteemed NLI confer-

ence. As Zain, we take pride in continuously pushing boundaries and breaking limitations and that is what this conference's title "Breaking Barriers" is all about. This marks another year of collaboration with the NLI team, who share our commitment to driving digitization, empowering women, promoting diversity, and fostering inclusion," he said.

Khashti added that the partnership "perfectly aligns" with Zain's overarching strategy and direction. "Today, we are fortunate to witness such speakers sharing their success stories, thus enriching our collective experience. We extend our best wishes to all participants for a fruitful and rewarding conference," he said.



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the second day of National Leadership Institute (NLI) conference titled 'Breaking Barriers' on Oct 10, 2023.

KU uses AI to develop educational process

KUWAIT: Through the widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI) recently, Kuwait University (KU) "hopped on the wagon" and began to use AI applications to develop the educational process and boost its output. The use of AI also came in line with the government's vision for digital transformation in Kuwait. In regards to the use of AI, the head of laboratories and AI at the computer engineering department of KU, Dr Abdullah Al-Mutawa, told KUNA that the university uses numerous applications of AI, namely Chabot's and facial recognition robots.

AI is used in administrative tasks to formulate statistics important to the KU decision-making process, he added. Al-Mutawa revealed that AI was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to monitor students taking unified exams and tests via the "Model" system without human interference. The model system utilizes cloud technology to ensure the continuity of services despite the growing number of users, connecting it with Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Teams, which enable students to view all available university classes and activities simultaneously, including tests and homework, said Al-Mutawa.

In regards to AI's benefits in terms of digital transformation, the academics affirmed that AI streamlined processes and made it simple to finish tasks in record time. For example, AI could provide academics with reminders of their eligibility to take sabbaticals for research and higher studies in addition to other services, as indicated by Al-Mutawa. He noted that AI required that all data needed to be available to function properly; however, he stressed that parameters for AI usage should follow UN resolutions regarding the ethical use of technology or matters would become very complicated. — KUNA



جامعة الكويت
KUWAIT UNIVERSITY

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: This picture shows the moon in its waning crescent phase, as seen from Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NBK continues annual breast cancer awareness campaign

KUWAIT: Reflecting its dedication to deliver on its CSR mission in all fields, especially healthcare, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continued its annual campaign to raise awareness among the whole society, and women in particular, about breast cancer dangers, prevention methods and the importance of early detection. As it is NBK's tradition to adopt innovative ways in extending social support, it participated in supporting the breast cancer awareness campaign this time by sharing a post on social media asking NBK followers to write an inspirational message to patients. The overall engagement exceeded expectations as it received over 500+ comments and likes.

In cooperation with Floward, NBK team extracted the comments and handwrote them on special cards added to flower bouquets from Floward to give away to all the patients during their visit to Hussain Makki Juma Hospital. The patients loved the messages and expressed their gratefulness to receive wishes from people they do not know, which gives them significant moral support in their battle against the disease.

Speaking on this, Farah Bastaki, Digital Communications Manager at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are always honored to perform our corporate social responsibilities, especially in healthcare, as we intensify efforts to provide the necessary support to this sector, including its facilities, innovative treatment methods, and awareness campaigns." "Our support of healthcare and awareness initiatives is part of delivering on our social responsibility, which is instrumental



in our endeavors to achieve sustainability," she added.

"NBK firmly believes in the importance of raising awareness among society in all fields, especially healthcare sector, as high level of awareness is crucial to build a future in which all segments of society enjoy sustainable growth and prosperity," she underscored. "NBK's annual awareness campaign in October, which coincides with World Breast Cancer Awareness Month, includes sharing awareness messages on our social media platforms to encourage early screening and raise awareness about the risks of the disease, which poses a major threat to women's health," she noted.

NBK has a rich record of leading healthcare initiatives including blood donation campaigns, as well as providing all sorts of supports to hospitals and healthcare organizations and societies in Kuwait. The bank also organizes frequent multi-purpose awareness activities and campaigns to promote health awareness and encourage healthy lifestyle among the community at large.



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Kuwait, Oman FMs discuss agenda of GCC-EU meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met his Omani counterpart Bader bin Hamad Al-Busaidi on the fringes of the 27th session of the GCC-EU Ministerial Council in Muscat on Monday. Both ministers reviewed the agenda topics of the GCC-EU ministerial, being held on October 9- 10, with emphasis on the item relating to the disinformation in the recent Iraqi Federal Supreme Court ruling against Khor Abdullah agreement. The discussions also dealt with the latest developments of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and ways to advance the GCC-EU strategic partnership.

Renewable energy

Meanwhile, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministers in charge of climate affairs said they encourage the efforts aimed at triple the production of renewable energy globally. This came in the final communiqué issued by the ministers at the end of their meeting in Riyadh on the sidelines of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Climate Week.

The ministers affirmed that reaching this ratio comes through existing goals and policies and achieving it in other low- and zero-emission technologies, including source-control and removal technologies, in line with national conditions by 2030. The communiqué indicated that the ministers stressed commitment to the principles and provisions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

They further emphasized full support for the UAE's hosting of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 28), due in November. They agreed that the international community should avoid excluding major energy sources or neglecting to invest in them, which may lead to challenges in energy markets and an unequal impact, especially on developing societies and countries. They called, at the same time, for adopting a "balanced approach" to boost global economic growth closely linked to energy security and availability.

This can be achieved by taking advantage of various energy sources and working to achieve a transition to clean energy in a practical, gradual, and fair manner, it elaborated. The communiqué stressed the need to adopt a gradual and practical approach to realizing the targets of the Paris Agreement and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, taking into account the national

conditions in each country and the availability of technological solutions.

To reach the carbon neutrality target, it requires leveraging zero-carbon solutions and carbon recycling technologies across economic sectors. The ministers highlighted the significance of the principles of climate agreements, notably those relating to equitability, sharing of responsibilities, and understanding of the national conditions of various countries.

Those principles, besides the right of developing countries to sustainable development and a diversified economy, constitute the groundwork for climate action under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, according to the communiqué. The ministers agreed that there are three basic elements for practical and logical transformations in energy: energy security, economic development, and climate change.



Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met his Omani counterpart Bader bin Hamad Al-Busaidi in Muscat on Monday. — KUNA

They also highlighted the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to technological solutions for mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change, investing in the production and storage of renewable energy, and recycling carbon. They urged scaling up the global effort to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

They underscored the importance of the industrialized countries' honoring the pledge to provide \$100 billion annually for the developing countries to build resilience to adapt to the impacts of climate change. They expressed hope that the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) would lead to ambitious outcomes for reactivating the UN fund for addressing the irreversible damage caused by climate change in developing countries, the communiqué added. — KUNA



UK Labour leader promises 'decade of national renewal'

US back as Zionists' unequivocal defender after Hamas attacks

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Gaza hospitals overwhelmed by air strikes, siege: Doctors

Total blockade by Zionists banned under international law: UN



GAZA: A fireball erupts during the Zionist bombardment of Gaza City on Oct 9, 2023. — AFP photos

GAZA: Doctors and nurses at Gaza's overwhelmed Al-Shifa hospital on Tuesday were busy treating hundreds of casualties from Zionist air raids as the Palestinian health ministry warned of a "catastrophic situation". Akram al-Haddad, 25, was visibly distraught at the bedside of his one-and-a-half-year-old nephew.

The baby, Abd al-Rahman al-Dos, was injured in an air strike that killed 17 people including another relative, a four-year-old boy. Dos and his parents survived the bombing that destroyed the family's Gaza City home, but the baby required urgent medical intervention, said the doctor treating him.

The doctor, Abdallah, who asked to be identified by his first name only, said that "he needs an emergency surgery for his head injury, but must wait until an operation room is available." However, a free room might not be enough to save Dos.

No operating without electricity

"We need to ensure there's electricity supply and that we have the necessary equipment" before starting any operations, said Abdallah. "We have a list with many names of wounded patients waiting their turn. Some of them lost their lives due to a lack of resources."

Emergency room doctor Mohammed Ghonim told AFP the medical teams had dealt with "large numbers of casualties, most of them women and children, arriving at the same time". Medical supplies, including oxygen tanks, were running low in the blockaded coastal enclave, Ghonim said, and "we have an electricity and water crisis".

The doctor was interrupted by the arrival of a new group of wounded: three women, two children, an elderly man and two young men were admitted to the emergency room. Nearby, a staff member was com-

forting Umm Rama al-Hassasneh, who was lying on a hospital bed next to her four children, aged three to six, all wounded in a Zionist air strike that hit their Gaza City neighborhood of Sheikh Ridwan.

The family home was badly damaged when a neighboring house was targeted by Zionist warplanes, Hassasneh told AFP. "They bombed the house," she said. "I was injured and the children were injured, and we were taken here. We're waiting to be treated."

The Gaza health ministry has said that 765 people have been killed and 4,000 wounded by Zionist strikes since Saturday. The Zionist occupation was retaliating following a Hamas assault in the south of the country in which the militant group killed more than 900 Zionists and foreigners and kidnapped dozens more.

'Nowhere else to go'

The health ministry warned that a shortage of medical supplies and medications would lead to a "catastrophic situation" in the Gaza Strip. Eight hospitals were "not sufficient to meet the needs" of the Gaza strip, which has a population of 2.3 million, the ministry said.

The Zionist defense minister declared on Monday a "total siege" against the Gaza Strip, with "no electricity, no water, no gas" for the enclave. The United Nations' human rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday that the siege was banned under international law.

The Zionist bombardment has rendered the Beit Hanoun hospital inoperative and damaged Al-Shifa hospital's neonatal unit. The head of media for the Hamas-led government, Salameh Maarouf, said that "given the great number of wounded," Gaza was facing a shortage of "medication, medicals supplies,

Zionists have found renewed dedication to their national cause, while Palestinians and their Arab supporters have also rallied in a rare mass show of popular unity in the region. "I do not think there is a single Palestinian who does not support what happened," said Issam Abu Bakr, a Palestinian official in the West Bank. The Hamas attack was a "natural reaction to the crimes committed by (the Zionist occupation)", which has "turned its back on the political negotiation process," he added.

'Die silently'

The Hamas assault has killed at least 900 Zionists and wounded hundreds more, while the militants have taken around 150 hostages, the Zionist government has said. Zionist retaliatory strikes on the Gaza Strip targets have killed 765 people and also wounded hundreds, according to the Hamas-controlled health ministry in the blockaded enclave.

Hours after the operation began on Saturday, Palestinian supporters distributed sweets in south Lebanon and the capital Beirut. The occupation and Lebanon are still technically at war and Zionist troops occupied the country's south for 22 years.

Residents of the southern port city of Sidon set off fire crackers and gathered in public squares as mosques blasted chants praising "Palestinian resis-



KHAN YUNIS: A Palestinian woman reacts as bodies of people killed in overnight Zionist shelling arrive for their funeral in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, on Oct 10, 2023.

scanner and X-rays". He accused the Zionists of "deliberately creating a miserable humanitarian situation through its restrictions and attacks." Maarouf said the Zionist entity had "warned that if fuel is supplied to the power plant by Egypt, the power plant will be bombed".

In the corridors of Al-Shifa hospital and in

tance fighters who are writing the most wonderful, heroic epic". A rally was held at the American University of Beirut, where 18-year-old Palestinian student Reem Sobh said: "We are unable to carry weapons but at least, we are able to support them."

On Instagram, Lebanese comedian Shaden Fakhri explained the wave of support widely condemned in the West. "What do you expect from Palestinians? To get killed every day and not do anything about it ... to die silently?" she said in a video. "They will carry arms and fight back. This is their right," she added, noting that she "can be against Hamas and still support any armed resistance against the oppressor, against (Zionist) apartheid".

In the Tunisian capital, schools raised Palestinian flags and a coalition of organizations and political parties have called for massive solidarity rallies. The presidency declared its "full and unconditional support of the Palestinian people" and of their right to resist occupation.

'Nothing to lose'

In Damascus, the Palestinian flag lit up the city's opera house. Syrian university employee Marah Suleiman, 42, said the Hamas attack "stirred up a feeling within us that had not been moved for

its gardens, multiple families had sought refuge. Having received treatment, many of them at no other choice. "My home has been completely destroyed. I don't know why. All the houses here have been destroyed," said Abu Ashour Sukayk, 39. "It was a dark night for my wife, my children and me. We spent the night in the hospital. There

many years, and revived the spirit of resistance". Palestinians "have nothing to lose after all the killing, destruction and displacement they have been subjected to," she said.

In Egypt, which bans unauthorized protests, football fans turned matches into displays of solidarity, with pro-Palestinian chants. In the war-scarred Iraqi capital Baghdad, people trampled and torched Zionist flags during rallies in Tahrir Square.

Even Arab Gulf states joined the wave of solidarity despite the US-brokered Abraham Accords, which saw the Zionist occupation normalize relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020. The two countries released statements relatively sympathetic to the Zionists, but the popular mood told a different story.

Expressions of solidarity with Palestinians filled social media in the UAE, and prominent Emirati analyst Abdulkhaleq Abdulla condemned Zionist attacks on Gaza as a "campaign of genocide" on X, formerly Twitter. In Bahrain, protesters have covered their faces, some with Palestinian keffiyehs, during near daily, unauthorized rallies. "We will always support our brothers in Palestine," said a 29-year-old demonstrator, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from the authorities. "If we were able to reach them, we would

'Spirit of resistance': Arab support for Palestinians swells

BEIRUT: In mosques, football stadiums and towns across the Arab world, pro-Palestinian sentiment has surged after Hamas' unprecedented attack on the Zionist entity, sparking a groundswell of solidarity for the Palestinians.

From Ramallah to Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo, people have distributed sweets, danced and chanted prayers in support of the "resistance" to the Zionists' long-standing occupation of Palestinian land. "My entire life, I have seen (Zionists) kill us, confiscate our lands and arrest our children," said Farah al-Saadi, a 52-year-old coffee vendor from Ramallah in the Zionist-occupied West Bank.

"I was pleased by what Hamas did," said the man, whose son is in Zionist detention, adding however that he feared the scale of "(Zionist) crimes in Gaza" in retaliation. The multi-pronged attack on the occupation launched Saturday by the Palestinian militant group Hamas has killed hundreds in on both sides.

International

US back as Zionists' unequivocal defender after Hamas attacks

US diplomacy likely to steer away from pressuring Netanyahu

WASHINGTON: The shock of a Hamas assault has restored the United States to a familiar role as unequivocal backer of the Zionist occupation, using its leverage not to encourage calm but to shield its ally. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has historically had rocky relations with Democratic presidents such as Joe Biden over the Zionist leader's opposition to Palestinian sovereignty and engagement with Iran and, most recently, his hard-right government's overhaul of the judiciary.

Biden had already turned a page with Netanyahu in pursuit of a potentially landmark Zionist-Saudi normalization deal. That prospect is now likely on hold, but the violence has also pushed his differences with Netanyahu farther into the rear view.

The US president has promised "full support" for the Zionists, sent munitions and ordered warships to the eastern Mediterranean — a veiled warning to Iran, which despite voicing support for Hamas has rejected allegations it had a direct role in organizing the attack.

"The accusations of an Iranian role ... are based on political motives," foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said. Kanani said the Islamic republic does not intervene "in the decision-making of other countries, including Palestine" and threatened the Zionist entity with a "devastating response" if it were to attack Iran. Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations also denied allegations of the country's involvement, in a statement issued overnight.

At the UN Security Council, Washington pushed for full-throated condemnation of Hamas, while Moscow sought a broader statement backing a return to a Middle East peace process. The US response to the bloodshed has not been "the usual jargon about calling on all sides to exercise restraint. It was, we'll give (the Zionist occupation) whatever it needs, and making clear unambiguous support," said David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He expected US

diplomacy to focus on protecting the occupation, including from UN censure, and freeing hostages rather than pressuring Netanyahu.

Not time to question Zionists

Biden's predecessor Donald Trump, with the backing of his evangelical Christian base, had pushed through a Zionist wish list including recognizing Jerusalem as its capital. The Biden team returned to earlier US calls for a Palestinian state but did little to advance the goal, seeing zero chance under Netanyahu.

But the Hamas attack stunned US officials. Asked about protecting civilians in Gaza as the occupation cut off electricity, water and food to the impoverished territory, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby replied only that "(The Zionist occupation) has the right to defend itself" and noted it was doing so "very aggressively" due to the scope of the Hamas violence.

The US envoy to combat anti-Semitism, Deborah Lipstadt, earlier called the Hamas attacks "the most lethal assault against Jews since the Holocaust" and said, "No one has the right to tell (the Zionist occupation) how to defend itself and prevent and deter future attacks."

Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to the Zionist entity now at the Council on Foreign Relations, said that even if Biden encouraged Netanyahu to show restraint, it is "likely to fall on deaf ears at this point." But an extended Zionist operation risks further inflaming the Middle East — exactly what the Biden administration has sought to avoid as it focuses on global competition with China and Russia, which both work closely with Iran and have warming ties with Saudi Arabia.

"From a values point of view, the US stands with (the Zionists); from an interest point of view, the US needs to shove out Russia and China," said Laura Blumenfeld, a former senior policy advisor to the State

Department's Zionist-Palestinian negotiating team. Blumenfeld, now a senior fellow at Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies, said that Saudi Arabia could choose another side if it perceives the Zionists as weak. "This is Middle East tennis and if you're considering going into a doubles game, it's doubles with hand-grenades and no one wants a partner who swings and misses," she said.

Criticism on left

Since the Hamas attacks, Trump's Republican Party has slammed Biden over his quiet diplomacy with Iran, although both parties rallied around the Zion-

ists and calls for more military aid. But the occupation's once rock-solid support in the US Congress has declined in recent years, with Netanyahu facing sharp criticism from the left on policies such as his government's unapologetic pursuit of settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Phyllis Bennis of the progressive Institute for Policy Studies said that the United States had the power to insist on accountability for both Hamas and the Zionists over harm to civilians. "If you're serious about ending the violence, you have to look at root causes, as unwilling as so many are to do that," she said. — AFP

pushing bogus conspiracies and an ad revenue sharing program with content creators that researchers say incentivizes engagement instead of accuracy. Experts fear these moves have increased the risk of misinformation provoking real-world harm, amplifying hate and violence especially in a fast-evolving crisis scenario such as the one unfolding in the occupied lands and Gaza. "Social media platforms are struggling to keep up with the constant churn of misinformation and incitements to violence," Andy Carvin, from the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), told AFP.

"It's a trend that's been building for some time now, and it's only gotten worse with layoffs impacting trust and safety teams, hampering their ability to keep up with the chaos. "And in the case of X, changes to the platform have utterly shattered what was previously one of its greatest strengths — monitoring breaking news and helping users separate fact from fiction."

'Flood of grifters'

Social media users are being bombarded with fake combat photos, old videos from Syria repurposed to look like they were taken from Gaza, and conflict-themed video game footage being passed



WASHINGTON: The White House is illuminated in the blue and white colors of the Zionist flag on Oct 9, 2023. — AFP

Tech firms struggle as Zionist-Palestinian falsehoods explode

WASHINGTON: From fake accounts impersonating journalists to war-themed video games fueling false narratives, tech platforms are struggling to contain a tsunami of misinformation around Palestinian-Zionist hostilities after rolling back content moderation policies. While major world events typically trigger a deluge of falsehoods, researchers say the scale and speed with which misinformation proliferated online following the weekend's Hamas attack on the Zionist occupation was unlike ever before.

The conflict, experts say, offers a grim case study of the diminished ability of prominent platforms such as Meta-owned Facebook and X, formerly known as Twitter, to combat false information in a climate of layoffs and cost-cutting that have gutted trust and safety teams. Aggravating the problem on the Elon Musk-owned X, in particular, are a slew of contentious measures such as the restoration of accounts



PANAMA: A man, backdropped by a Palestinian flag, takes part in a protest against the Zionist occupation's military operations in Gaza and in support of the Palestinian people in front of the Zionist embassy on Oct 9, 2023. -- AFP

off as a scene from a Hamas attack, misinformation researchers say. An image circulating online purported to show Zionist soldiers captured by Hamas, but AFP factcheckers found the picture was taken in 2022 during a military exercise in Gaza.

AFP factcheckers also found several posts on X, Facebook and TikTok promoted a fake White House document allocating \$8 billion in military assistance to the Zionists. "The sheer amount of doctored, fake, old videos and images of attacks circulating (online) is making it harder to understand what is going on" in Palestine, said Alessandro Accorsi, a senior analyst at the Crisis Group think tank.

Accorsi voiced "huge concern" that the misinformation, especially fake images of hostages including children, could stoke violence. "In crises like terrorist atrocities, wars and natural disasters, people tend to descend on social media platforms for quickly accessible information," Imran Ahmed, chief executive of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, told AFP. "(But) the flood of grifters spreading lies and hate to garner engagement and followers, combined with algorithms that promote this extreme and disturbing content, is why social media is in fact such a bad place to access reliable information."

Making matters worse, tech platforms appear to be abandoning efforts to elevate quality information. Social media traffic to top news websites from platforms such as Facebook and X has fallen off a cliff over the past year, according to data cited by US media from the research firm Similarweb. — AFP

Kuwait calls for 'just solutions' as Gaza burns

PARIS: Kuwait has urged the international community to work earnestly in a bid to find "just solutions" to the conflict in the Middle East as violence there continues to intensify, a diplomat said on Tuesday. Underscoring Kuwait's "grave concern" over the developments in the Middle East, Kuwait's permanent delegate to the United Nations' cultural agency UNESCO, Dr Adam Al-Mulla, said any solution to the conflict in the Middle East should address the "root cause" of the upsurge in violence.

The Kuwaiti diplomat went on to emphasize the "necessity" to ensure the adequate protection of the Palestinians, ultimately granting them their inalienable rights to a decent living, which includes fulfilling their statehood aspirations, he added. Kuwait is currently serving a four-year term on the UN cultural agency's executive council.

Palestinian journalists killed

Meanwhile, three Palestinian journalists were killed early Tuesday in a Zionist air strike on Gaza City, a media union and an official said, as heavy fighting rages for a fourth day. The latest deaths bring the number of Palestinian journalists killed in the fighting since Saturday to seven, the Hamas-run media office said in a statement. The Gaza journalists' syndicate announced "the martyrdom of three journalists in the Gaza Strip in the ongoing aggression".

The media chief of Gaza's Hamas-run government, Salameh Maarouf, identified the three as Saïd Al-Taweel, director of Al-Khamisa news agency; press photographer Mohammed Sobboh; and Hisham Nawajah, a correspondent for a Gaza news agency. They were killed in a strike while covering the evacuation of a residential building near Gaza City's fishing port. Maarouf said, condemning Zionists' "criminal behavior against journalists".

Members of the press were standing several dozen meters from the building after a resident received a telephone call from the army warning of an imminent strike, an AFP correspondent reported. Witnesses said the airstrikes hit a different building, closer to where the journalists had been. Journalist Asad Shamlakh was killed on Sunday, the media office statement said, adding that two cameramen were missing and 10 journalists had been wounded. Three journalists were killed on Saturday, according to the Palestinian statement and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The New York-based media rights group said on Monday that Ibrahim Mohammad Lafi, a photographer, Mohammad



GAZA: Emergency responders bring wounded children at Al-Shifa hospital following Zionist strikes in Gaza City on October 10, 2023. — AFP

Jarghoun, a reporter, and Mohammad El-Salhi had been shot dead in different incidents. "We call on all sides to remember that journalists are civilians and should not be targeted," Sherif Mansour of the Committee to Protect Journalists said in a statement. "Accurate reporting is critical during times of crisis, and the media has a vital role to play in bringing news from Gaza and the Zionist entity to the world."

A fresh salvo of rockets

Meanwhile, a fresh salvo of rockets was fired from south Lebanon towards a Zionist entity on Tuesday, Lebanese state media said, an attack that drew retaliatory fire, according to a military source. It is the third day the border area has seen an exchange of fire and comes after Hamas militants launched an unprecedented multi-pronged attack on the southern flank from the blockaded Gaza Strip on the weekend.

"Rockets were fired from... southern Lebanon towards the Galilee" region, the official National News Agency (NNA) said, while the military source, requesting anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media, confirmed that it triggered retaliatory Zionist fire. The military source said the rockets were fired from the town of Qalileh, located in the south Lebanon district of Tyre. There were

no immediate reports of casualties on the Lebanese side, according to the NNA.

No group immediately claimed the rocket fire. "In response to the launches identified from Lebanese territory toward Zionist territory, IDF (army) soldiers are currently responding with artillery fire," Zionist forces said. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which acts as a buffer between Lebanon and Zionist entities, said it was in contact with both sides "to de-escalate this very dangerous situation." Tuesday's border exchange comes a day after strikes on Lebanon killed three Hezbollah members, according to the Iran-backed group. Hezbollah said it retaliated by striking two barracks.

The Zionist army said its soldiers had "killed a number of armed suspects" who had crossed the frontier from Lebanon. On Sunday, Hezbollah said it had fired artillery shells and guided missiles at Zionist entities "in solidarity" with attacks launched from Gaza by its ally Hamas. The Zionist army said it hit back with artillery into southern Lebanon. In 2006, Hezbollah and Zionists fought a 34-day war that left more than 1,200 dead in Lebanon, mostly civilians, and 160 in the Zionist entity, mostly soldiers. The two countries remain technically at war. Zionists have warned Hezbollah against involvement in the war with Gaza. — Agencies

Trump's darkening language triggers fears of violence

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's populist, politically incorrect language is often framed as an asset but a troubling escalation in his incendiary rhetoric is prompting fears over the potential for violence among his inflamed supporters. In recent days, the irascible former US president and 2024 candidate has implied that the country's top military officer should be executed and joked about the elderly husband of a political foe being attacked in a home invasion.

Critics say he hit a new low last week with comments about illegal immigrants so extreme that the Anti-Defamation League, an advocacy group, saw echoes of Nazi rhetoric. "Nobody has any idea where these people are coming from, and we know they come from prisons, we know they come from mental institutions, insane asylums, we know they're terrorists," Trump told conservative news site The National Pulse.

"Nobody has ever seen anything like we're witnessing right now. It is a very sad thing for our country. It's poisoning the blood of our country." The ADL's Jonathan Greenblatt told MSNBC television that Trump appeared to have been fed the line by someone familiar with Hitler's infamous complaint.

Trump's exhortations to violence are nothing new - he suggested that protesters should be "roughed up" at a rally in 2016 and that looters should be shot during the 2020 racial protests over the police murder of George Floyd. His months-long campaign of lies claiming that he had been cheated in his 2020 election loss culminated in addressing an angry crowd in Washington on January 6, 2021, which then went and attacked the US Capitol.

Many participants in the ransacking of the seat of US democracy later told investigators that they considered that they were acting on Trump's orders. Trump's inflammatory remarks used to shock America, generating days of coverage. His language no longer raises the stir it once did in a fatigued political and media establishment watching him cruise to the Republican nomination as the 2024 presidential election candidate. — AFP

International

UK Labour leader promises 'decade of national renewal'

Starmer vows 1.5m houses, strengthening worker rights in Liverpool conference

LIVERPOOL: Britain's opposition leader Keir Starmer vowed Tuesday to spearhead a "decade of national renewal" if his Labour party returns to power after nearly 14 years in a general election expected next year. Starmer, who was showered with glitter by a protester at the start of his speech, used the address to his resurgent center-left party's annual conference in Liverpool to promise Britain "its future back."



A protester throws glitter on Starmer at the start of his keynote address to delegates.

Pledging to tackle a cost-of-living crisis sparked by Brexit, pandemic lockdowns and the war in Ukraine, Starmer said there was "no magic wand" and urged "ambition, determination, patience" if he succeeds the Conservatives' Rishi Sunak as prime minister. "A decade of national renewal — that's what it will take," Starmer told a cheering audience, suggesting he is eyeing at least two terms in power after the vote, which must be held by January 2025 at the latest.

Starmer's wide-ranging speech lasted almost an hour after it was initially disrupted by an activist heckler shouting "true democracy is citizen-led" and "politics needs an update" before being led off stage. He was later arrested, police said.

"We will face down the age of insecurity together," Starmer told delegates, urging voters to trust Labour

against the Tories, who have had three prime ministers since the last election in 2019. "People are looking at us because they want our wounds to heal, and we are the healers," he said, vowing to modernize the state. "People are looking to us because they want to build a new Britain, and we are the builders."

'Plan for Britain'

Starmer has shepherded Labour back to the center ground since becoming leader in April 2020, after succeeding left-winger Jeremy Corbyn following a landslide defeat to the Tories at the last general election in 2019. Labour currently enjoys double-digit leads in most opinion polls. "I thought it was a great speech and it gave me lots of hope for the future. We need that now more than ever," Labour Party member Kate Sheridan, 57, told AFP.

Despite leading in the polls for more than a year, Starmer has faced criticism for being too cautious and for not clearly spelling out a vision for Britain. Starmer sought to confront that criticism, pledging to "bulldoze" his way through restrictions on much-needed housing, rejuvenate the ailing economy through modernized infrastructure and support for green industries and get the country's cherished public health system "back on its feet". "Today we turn the page on the question 'why Labour?', with a plan for Britain built to last, with higher growth, safer streets, cheap British power in your home, more opportunity in your community," he said. Dan Walsh, a 16-year-old party member watching from an overflow room, said the speech had "good physical policies that will do well on the doorstep". John Barnes, 56, added Starmer was "fired up" for the occasion. "He was focused, he was purposeful," he said.

'Trickle-down nonsense'

Not everyone was blown away, however. "As a lefty, it's all been a bit hard but I'm more optimistic than I was six months ago," said 71-year-old Fiona English,

out of the country overland by the Nigerien army, without saying where they would go. The withdrawal was expected to cause logistical headaches for the French, with few safe routes out of a region plagued by myriad jihadist groups.

Around 1,000 French troops were stationed in the capital Niamey, with another 400 deployed at two forward bases in the north-west, near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, a hotbed of insurgent activity. It is the fourth time in under two years that French troops have been sent packing by a former African colony, dealing a severe blow to France's influence on the continent and to its prestige on the international stage.

Eyes on US

France's ambassador to Niger was also given his marching orders by the leaders of the July 26 coup that toppled French-backed President Mohamed Bazoum. He returned to Paris on September 27, prompting celebrations in Niamey.

Niamey's military rulers had labelled the announcement of France's diplomatic and troop withdrawals in September as a "step towards the sovereignty of Niger". Mali and Burkina Faso, which have also under-



LIVERPOOL: Britain's main opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria Starmer arrive on the third day of the annual Labour Party conference on Oct 10, 2023. — AFP photos

gone coups in the past two years, have also turned their backs on France, accusing it of a colonialist attitude and of failing to effectively combat jihadists.

Mali has pivoted towards Moscow, bringing in mercenaries from the notorious Wagner group. In Niger, anti-French demonstrators have also been seen waving Russian flags — scenes in stark contrast to rejoicing that greeted French troops in 2013 when they helped liberate northern Mali from Al-Qaeda-affiliated insurgents. Niger had in recent months been acting as a regional hub for French troops helping armies in the region fight Islamist insurgents. French President Emmanuel Macron had initially attempted to keep his troops and ambassador in the country, arguing that only the ousted Bazoum had the authority to request their withdrawal.

In late September however, he gave into pressure to bring them home after months of anti-French protests. France still insists, however, that Bazoum's ousted government remains the sole legitimate authority. The former president remains under house arrest in Niamey. The United States still has about 1,100 military personnel in the country but after Macron's announcement said last month it would "evaluate" its next steps. — AFP

Sunak took over from Liz Truss almost a year ago after her radical tax-slashing agenda spooked the financial markets. He has sought to stabilize the economic situation but struggled to get growth. Labour will put the economy front and center of its campaign, Starmer said. He attacked the ruling Tories' right-wing economic orthodoxy as "trickle-down nonsense, that sees wealth trickle up and jobs trickle out". While the mood at the four-day conference, which ends Wednesday, has been buoyant, many party chiefs are warning against complacency with the election possibly still 15 months away. — AFP

French troops begin leaving coup-hit Niger

PARIS: The French army said Tuesday it had begun withdrawing its troops from Niger after being ordered out of the country by the leaders of a coup that ousted a pro-Paris president. The move kicks off a complex and sensitive process that Paris expects to be completed by the end of the year, drawing the curtain on another French anti-jihadist operation in Africa.

"The first troops have left," the spokesman of the French chief of staff told AFP, confirming an announcement Monday by Niger's military leadership, which said that the 1,400-strong French contingent would begin leaving Tuesday. A French defense source said a first group of soldiers that were considered priority for evacuation for health or humanitarian reasons flew out of Niger on Monday. Niger had spoken of convoys of troops being escorted



NIAMEY: A French Army military vehicle belonging to a convoy of French troops is seen crossing the Lazaret district in Niamey on Oct 10, 2023. — AFP

US forces play cat and mouse as migrants suffer

EAGLE PASS: Almost every day at the US-Mexico border, uniformed American officers reinforce razor wire fences that another group of American officials has just cut. Migrants hoping to cross into the United States watch and wait, knowing that one group will come to their aid if they get into trouble while crossing the river that marks the frontier, or fall victim to the oppressive desert heat. The others will not.

To the migrants, the Jekyll-and-Hyde American response to their plight is another baffling obstacle on their lengthy and dangerous journey to what they hope is a better life. To the American officials in Eagle Pass, it's the consequence of a clash between the local and the federal: the conservative ideology of red state Texas and the more liberal national government. "It's not that we are opening it for them to enter," one Customs and Border Patrol agent tells AFP on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media. "This is a rescue mission," he said of the federal response. CBP officers regularly take wire cutters to the tangled lengths of

razor wire when they see tragedy unfolding just feet (meters) away.

Temperatures here in southern Texas regularly hit 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 Celsius) during the day and can plunge below freezing on winter nights. Left stranded in the hostile no-man's land, with violent human traffickers and desert behind them, and razor wire in front of them, migrants have died. "Some-



EAGLE PASS: A US Border Patrol agent cuts the razor wire on Sept 24, 2023. — AFP

times the wire is so tangled that it is difficult to cut," the CBP officer said as he helped a group through the border. A short time later, Texas National Guard soldiers from Operation Lone Star come through to patch the gap. "When a hole opens, we close it," said one soldier as he unfurled rolls of razor wire.

'Frustrating'

The game of cat and mouse is repeated most days at Eagle Pass, where, from a vacant lot of land under a bridge that connects Mexico to the United States, you can watch hundreds of migrants wade or swim into the Rio Grande, their eyes set on American soil and the promise of a new life.

After difficult, dangerous and often expensive journeys from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Honduras or Guatemala, the razor wire, with its swarm of miniature knives, is just another obstacle that must be overcome. "It's frustrating," said Yorman Peraza, who had walked for miles along the river early in the morning looking for a gap. He finally joined a group of around 300 people waiting at the wire, hoping for some kind of solution. "There is no way back," said Luis Robles, another Venezuelan who wanted to request asylum in the United States. "What we want is to work," he shouted another person next to him. As the sun climbed higher into the sky, border patrol troops began the rescue of several children from the group who appeared to be in difficulty in the river. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden pauses after speaking in the Roosevelt Room of the White House on Oct 4, 2023. — AFP

Biden quizzed over classified documents

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has been questioned as part of an investigation into the handling of classified documents found at his home and former private office, the White House said Monday. The 80-year-old Democrat voluntarily gave the interview on Sunday and Monday, at a time when the president was also dealing with the fallout of a deadly attack on Israel by the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The US attorney general appointed a special counsel in January to look into the handling of the secret files, which dated from Biden's time as vice president under president Barack Obama and immediately afterwards. "The president has been interviewed as part of the investigation being led by Special Counsel Robert Hur," White House Counsel's Office spokesman Ian Sams said in a statement. "The voluntary interview was conducted at the White House over two days, Sunday and Monday, and concluded Monday."

Sams added: "As we have said from the beginning, the president and the White House are cooperating with this investigation." He referred further questions to the Justice Department. US media said the fact that Biden himself had been interviewed showed that the investigation was likely nearing its end. Special Counsel Hur's team had previously carried out extensive interviews among Biden's staff, ABC news said.

The probe involves documents found in the possession of Biden, who was vice president under Obama when the papers were removed from the White House. Records were first unearthed in a private think tank office, where Biden used to work in Washington after his time as vice president, in November 2022.

'Nothing there'

More documents were found in the president's Wilmington, Delaware garage — next to his Corvette sports car — on December 20. Another set of files was then discovered in his home library on January 12. Back in January, Biden dismissed the probe, saying there was "nothing there." But mushrooming scandals over the handling of secret files have become an unexpectedly big issue in the 2024 US presidential elections. Former president Donald Trump, Biden's likely Republican opponent next year, separately faces trial over the alleged mishandling of classified documents after leaving office.

The special counsel in that case, Jack Smith, says Trump allegedly took classified documents to his Mar-A-Lago estate in Florida and refused to return them. Trump, 77, pleaded not guilty in June to charges of unlawfully retaining national defense information, conspiracy to obstruct justice and making false statements. The prosecutor in that case has asked for a 2024 trial, one of a number that Trump faces on various charges which include trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden. And Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, revealed in January that he too had uncovered documents marked as classified at his home. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023

ZainTECH to showcase digital solutions in its debut at GITEX

Company to highlight its sustainability commitment

DUBAI: ZainTECH, the integrated digital solutions provider of Zain Group, announces its inaugural participation at GITEX Global 2023, the largest ICT and technology exhibition and conference in the Middle East, taking place in Dubai, UAE, 16-20 October. The company's stand will be located at number C10 in Hall 21 within the Exhibition Center.

Since ZainTECH was launched two years ago in October 2021 at GITEX, it has been on a rapid journey of development, playing a pivotal role in the evolution of Zain Group's '4Sight' profitable growth strategy and core telecom business. It will be utilizing its participation at GITEX Global to showcase its cutting-edge portfolio of products and digital solutions spanning cloud, cybersecurity, data services, and drones and robotics.

Since its inception, ZainTECH has positioned itself as a catalyst for the transformation of enterprise and government customers in the MENA region, providing a center of excellence and managed solutions, which will be featured at the stand. During GITEX Global 2023, Zain plans to make several strategic announcements, highlighting its ongoing focus on industry collaborations, development and implementation of emerging technologies, and sustainability, all geared towards empowering enterprises and government entities with future-proof solutions.

Commenting on ZainTECH's debut participation at GITEX Global Andrew Hanna, CEO of ZainTECH commented, "Participating in GITEX Global offers an exceptional platform for us to showcase our latest technological innovations, engage with industry experts, and establish valuable connections with potential clients and partners from around the world. This leading regional event serves as a focal point for the tech industry, and we shall use it to celebrate our vision for an expedited time-to-value proposition for our clients, as we place digital excellence and the ability to drive positive results across the entire ICT landscape at the heart of our proposition."

Since its launch in 2021, ZainTECH has made some high-profile strategic acquisitions to enhance its competitive positioning in specific areas, and these affiliate organizations will be represented at the



- Cutting-edge portfolio of solutions spanning cloud, cybersecurity, data services and drones and robotics on display for governments and enterprises
- The ZainTECH eco-friendly stand built utilizing recycled material and designed for reuse, aligning with the company's commitment to sustainability principles

stand. Notably, the acquisition of Adfolks, a UAE-based cloud-native engineering firm recognized for its expertise in Modern Infrastructure, Application Modernization, Security, Data & Machine Learning, and Automation, was announced in May 2023. This strategic move follows the acquisition of BIOS Mid-

dle East, a regional managed secure cloud provider, announced in October 2022.

Dizlee and FOO @GITEX23

Digital-oriented entities from within Zain Group will also be showcasing their services at GITEX 2023, in-

cluding Dizlee, Zain Group's API digital monetization ecosystem provider, which as of 2023 had partnered with 30+ global OTT and solutions providers offering 100+ different digital innovations. Dizlee has processed over 240 million payment transactions since its launch in 2018. During GITEX, the platform will showcase its plans to launch an API marketplace that will allow developers around the world to instantly find the right tools & services and open up new revenue streams through API monetization.

Zain's B2B SAAS solution provider FOO specializes in empowering businesses providing innovative fintech solutions, built entirely in-house, that optimize digital capabilities for clients across diverse industries and enable them to deliver an unparalleled user experience. During GITEX 2023, FOO will showcase the digital transformation it has provided banks, fintech companies and key retailers across the globe, including Mastercard, Visa, Benefit, Zain Group, PwC and MAE. FOO's innovative platform is modular, built on digital micro-services that can be assembled to meet the specific requirements of each client. FOO's key products include solutions for remittances, digital wallets, tokenized transactions, fully automated micro-lending and BNPL.

Sustainability and thought leadership report

Zain places sustainability at the heart of everything it does in providing meaningful connectivity that drives equitable systemic change, empowering the communities it serves. During GITEX 23, Zain will have a dedicated area showcasing its multiple Sustainability initiatives across the region and release its latest thought leadership report, re-affirming Zain's position as the only telecom in the region to regularly publish reports of this nature, which provoke conversations and lobby for change.

The ZainTECH stand will be built utilizing recycled material, with component parts designed for reuse, aligning with the company's commitment to sustainability principles. The stand itself is modern and sleek, serving as the backdrop for a series of exciting demonstrations. Moreover, during GITEX 23, ZainTECH plans to announce a multitude of strategic partnerships.

Growth in Mideast to decline to 2.0% in 2023, says IMF

KUWAIT: Growth in the Middle East and Central Asia is projected to decline from 5.6 percent in 2022 to 2.0 percent in 2023, before picking up to 3.4 percent in 2024, with a 0.5 percentage point downward revision for 2023 and a 0.2 percentage point upward revision for 2024, the IMF said in its report. The change for 2023 is attributable mainly to a steeper-than-expected growth slowdown in Saudi Arabia, from 8.7 percent in 2022 to 0.8 percent in 2023, with a negative revision to the latter of 1.1 percentage point. The downgrade for growth in Saudi Arabia in 2023 reflects announced production cuts, including unilateral cuts and those in line with an agreement through OPEC+. Private investment, including that from "gigaproject" implementation, continues to support non-oil GDP growth, which remains strong and unchanged from previous projections. The downgrade for 2023 also reflects cuts to the growth forecast for Sudan to about -18.3 percent (a downward revision of nearly 20 percentage points) reflecting the outbreak of conflict, deteriorating domestic security, and the worsening humanitarian situation. The upgrade for 2024 reflects the unwinding of some of the announced production cuts, the report said.

In sub-Saharan Africa, growth is projected to decline to 3.3 percent in 2023 before picking up to 4.0 percent in 2024, with 0.2 percentage point and 0.1 percentage point downward revisions for 2023 and 2024, respectively, and with growth remaining below the historical average of 4.8 percent.

The projected decline reflects, in a number of cases,



worsening weather shocks, the global slowdown, and domestic supply issues, including, notably, in the electricity sector. Growth in Nigeria is projected to decline from 3.3 percent in 2022 to 2.9 percent in 2023 and 3.1 percent in 2024, with negative effects of high inflation on consumption taking hold.

The forecast for 2023 is revised downward by 0.3 percentage point, reflecting weaker oil and gas production than expected, partially as a result of maintenance work. In South Africa, growth is expected to decline from 1.9 percent in 2022 to 0.9 percent in 2023, with the decline reflecting power shortages, although with a 0.6 percentage point upward revision thanks to the intensity of power shortages in the second quarter of 2023 being lower than expected.

For emerging market and developing economies, growth is projected to decline relatively modestly, from 4.1 percent in 2022 to 4.0 percent in both 2023 and 2024, with a downward revision of 0.1 percentage point for 2024 compared with the July 2023 WEO Update projection. However, this average path hides regional divergences, with growth in two of the five main geographic regions rising in 2023 and then falling in 2024. Growth in emerging and developing Asia is projected to rise from 4.5 percent in 2022 to 5.2 percent in 2023, then to decline to 4.8 percent in 2024, with downward revisions of 0.1 percentage point and 0.2 percentage point for 2023 and 2024, respectively, compared with July projections.

World economy resilient to shocks but 'limping': IMF

MARRAKESH, Morocco: The International Monetary Fund kept its 2023 global growth forecast unchanged on Tuesday but warned that the economy is "limping along" as inflation remains high and the outlooks for China and Germany were downgraded. The IMF's updated World Economic Outlook still sees growth of 3.0 percent for 2023 and 2.9 percent for 2024, down 0.1 percentage points from its July report. "The economy continues to recover from the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, showing remarkable resilience," said the IMF's chief economist, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas.

"Yet growth remains slow and uneven. The global economy is limping along, not sprinting," he said at a news conference during the institution's annual meetings in Marrakesh, Morocco. Inflation, which has fallen sharply since last year, is predict-

ed to remain elevated at 6.9 percent this year, up slightly from July, and 5.8 percent in 2024, up 0.6 percentage points.

Central banks have raised interest rates sharply in efforts to contain inflation. The move could have knock-on effects on growth, but the IMF warned central banks against easing the monetary tightening too soon, adding that it still expects the global economy to have a "soft landing"—a slowdown that avoids recession. "The news on inflation is encouraging, but we're not quite there yet," Gourinchas said.

Gourinchas pointed to "important divergences" between countries. The United States is performing better than other major economies, with the IMF upgrading its growth forecast from 1.8 percent to 2.1 percent for this year. It will slow to 1.5 percent next year, but it is 0.5-percentage-points higher than in the IMF's July outlook. By contrast, China's outlook for



the next two years was lowered under the weight of a real estate crisis threatening the world's second biggest economy. The Chinese economy is now expected

to grow by 5.0 percent this year—down from 5.2 percent previously—and slow further to 4.2 percent in 2024, down from 4.5 percent. — AFP

First wind turbines reach Saudi green hydrogen plant: CEO

RIYADH: The first wind turbines have arrived at what Saudi officials bill as the world's biggest green hydrogen plant, in the futuristic NEOM megacity, the project's CEO told AFP on Tuesday.

"This week, we have our first delivery of wind turbines. They actually arrived in the port of NEOM, and they'll be delivered up to site towards the end of this week," said David Edmondson, CEO of the NEOM Green Hydrogen Company. Around 30 turbines are expected to be delivered by the end of the year along with the project's first solar panels, Edmondson said, laying the groundwork for eventual production of some 600 tons of green hydrogen per day. The \$8.4 billion NEOM green hydrogen plant is expected to reach full production by the end of 2026 and all its product will be for export.

The green hydrogen plant is located in the Oxagon region of NEOM, which officials describe as "an advanced and clean industrial ecosystem". NEOM has primarily garnered headlines for The Line, planned parallel mirror-encased skyscrapers extending over 170 kilometers (105 miles) of mountain and desert terrain. The green hydrogen produced at the plant will be converted into green ammonia for ease of transport and then converted back into green hydrogen at its destination "for use (as a fuel) in sectors including transport and heavy industry", according to a briefing note provided by the company. Hydrogen fuel is produced through water electrolysis, and is only considered "green" if the electricity used to generate electrolysis is obtained from renewables such as wind and solar power.

Technical challenges, high costs and a lack of infrastructure have all slowed the advance of clean hydrogen, though Saudi officials bill it as a promising solution in the fight against climate change and the transition away from fossil fuels. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude oil exporter, has been keen to tout its sustainability bona fides ahead of the COP28 climate talks that kick off next month in Dubai. Edmondson was speaking to AFP on the sidelines of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Climate Week, a flashy UN-organized conference hosted in the Saudi capital Riyadh that some participants have jokingly referred to as "COP27.5". Other announcements at the conference include a domestic scheme to allow companies to purchase credits offsetting greenhouse gas emissions and a "roadmap" to plant 10 billion trees across the kingdom.

Yet Saudi officials have taken heat from environmentalists for their calls for ramped-up fossil fuel investments, which they say are necessary to ensure energy security and which are also backed by Sultan Al-Jaber, COP28 president and head of the Emirati state-owned oil firm ADNOC. "If all this green hydrogen is used in the heavy-duty truck market, this will save the world up to five million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) per year, compared to diesel trucks or buses," the company briefing note said. The export-only approach reflects scant local demand compared to markets like Europe, Edmondson said. "The local market is not mature enough," Edmondson said. — AFP

Business

NBK OIL MARKET REPORT

Oil prices surge in September, but macro worries spur October drop

Kuwait crude rises to \$97.9, maintaining its premium over Brent

KUWAIT: Oil prices increased for the fourth month in a row in September, driven by tightening oil market fundamentals amid still resilient economic activity. Brent crude closed the month up at \$95.3/bbl (+9.7 percent m/m; +10.9 percent ytd), also posting its best quarterly performance (+27 percent q/q) since Q1 2022 in the process.

Local crude marker Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) rose to \$97.9/bbl (+9.1 percent m/m; +19.3 percent ytd), maintaining its premium over Brent in reflection of the relatively tighter medium sour crude landscape post-Saudi and Russian supply cuts. Moving into October, however, and oil's sharp rise ran into resistance,

funds and speculators. Net length, a measure of the difference between the number of contracts betting on oil prices increasing ('longs') and those betting on prices falling ('shorts'), spiked to its highest level (265k futures and options contracts) since early March, while the volume of outstanding oil contracts ('open interest') continued to rise to near-two-year high levels.

Global oil demand growth has remained fairly robust this year despite the economic dampening effect of tighter central bank monetary policies. Resurgent activity in China and firm OECD economic activity lifted demand to a record 103 mb/d in July, setting it on course to grow by 2.2 mb/d this year, predicts the

International Energy Agency's (IEA). The oil market balance, which switched into a supply deficit in Q2 2023, is estimated to have widened in Q3 to around 1.9 b/d, according to our calculations. The final quarter of the year should see it marginally narrow to a still hefty 1.5 mb/d. China's oil consumption data has surprised on the upside in recent months, with Chinese refiners setting a new record with the volume of crude they processed in July (approx. 15.2 mb/d) amid fairly elevated crude imports.

For 2024, however, the growth outlook appears less clear-cut, with wide variation among major energy forecasters' demand growth estimates. While the IEA sees oil demand growth more than halving to 1.0 mb/d, OPEC sees a more bullish gain of 2.2 mb/d. Both acknowledge, however, the potential negative impact on oil demand and macroeconomic activity of persistently high global interest rates. The IEA also sees oil consumption in the transportation sector especially being further suppressed by increased efficiency gains, electric vehicle penetration and working from home practices.

Outside of the OPEC+ group, US crude production has surged to its highest level since March 2020 at 12.9 mb/d, US Energy Information Administration (EIA) data shows. This is a gain of 800 kb/d year-to-date—the most since 2019—as high oil prices spur renewed oil major spending and efficiency gains. Indeed, crude output has increased even while the number of actively producing rigs continues to decline. According to Baker Hughes, oil rig counts have declined 18 percent since the start of the year. The EIA has marginally revised up its oil production forecasts for 2024 to 13.16 mb/d.

Chart 3: Oil demand growth & market balance (mb/d)

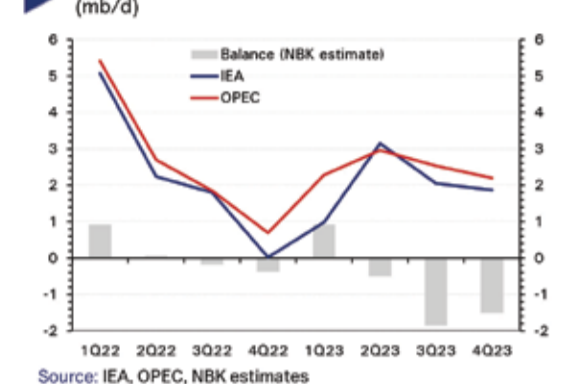


Chart 4: China imports and refining (mb/d)

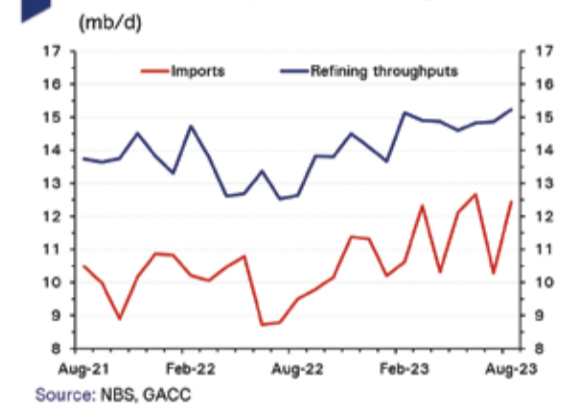


Chart 1: Oil prices (\$/bbl)

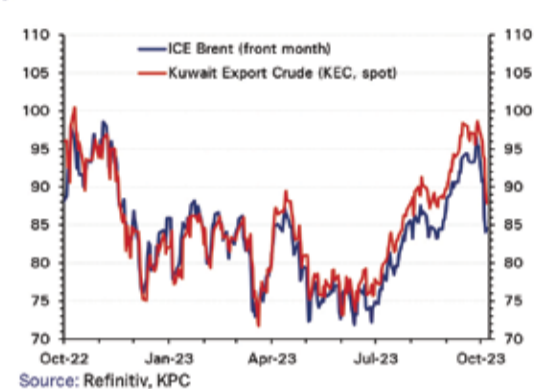
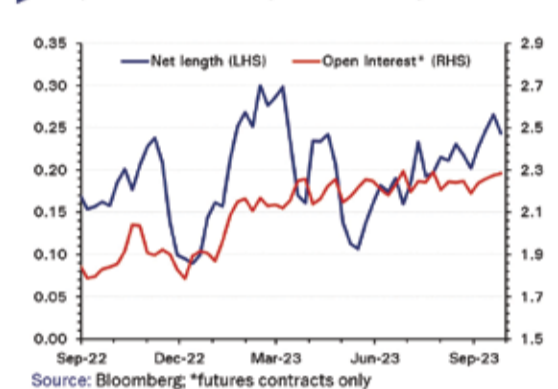


Chart 2: Brent money manager net length (million futures and options contracts)



with the price of Brent falling to the mid-80s. The impetus appeared to be a mix of profit-taking by speculators and oil demand concerns related to key central banks including the US Fed keeping interest rates higher for longer. The consequent strengthening of the US dollar—up 1.7 percent over the last two weeks on a trade-weighted basis—has also been a negative influence on the dollar-denominated oil price. That said, the attack by Hamas on the Zionist entity on October 7 has seen oil's geopolitical risk premium resurface: Brent rose more than 4 percent the following day to \$88/bbl, recouping some of its early month losses.

The bullish sentiment that has driven the oil rally is evident in money flows into Brent futures by hedge

International Energy Agency's (IEA). The oil market balance, which switched into a supply deficit in Q2 2023, is estimated to have widened in Q3 to around 1.9 b/d, according to our calculations. The final quarter of the year should see it marginally narrow to a still hefty 1.5 mb/d. China's oil consumption data has surprised on the upside in recent months, with Chinese refiners setting a new record with the volume of crude they processed in July (approx. 15.2 mb/d) amid fairly elevated crude imports.

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to 1.0 mb/d, OPEC sees a more bullish gain of 2.2 mb/d. Both acknowledge, however, the potential negative impact on oil demand and macroeconomic activity of persistently high global interest rates. The IEA also sees oil consumption in the transportation sector especially being further suppressed by increased efficiency gains, electric vehicle penetration and working from home practices.

US outpaces Europe while China struggles

MARRAKESH: The global economy remains resilient despite a series of challenges, but some countries are growing faster than others, with China showing signs of a slowdown, the IMF's chief economist told AFP. Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas spoke to AFP ahead of Tuesday's release of the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook in Marrakesh, Morocco. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Why is the United States performing better than Europe?

There are a number of things. The most important one by far is ... the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the disruption in energy markets. Europe is importing energy, so when it has to pay a higher energy bill, it's basically sending a check somewhere else and so the region becomes poorer. The US is not an energy importer, so when the price of energy goes up, if anything, they become richer. So there's a big difference right there. The second difference, I would say, is probably coming from the fact that we've seen US consumers being very resilient and, well, how do they do that? Well, they've been dipping into the savings. In many advanced economies, there was a buildup of what we call excess savings during the pandemic. In Europe, by and large, households have not started dipping into that.

Factor number three, I would say, there might be some difference in the transmission of monetary policy. So both in the euro area and the US, we've seen his massive tightening of monetary policy (by central banks). In the US you have a lot of long-term, fixed-rate mortgages in the housing market. People borrow 30 years and they lock in the rate at the time at which they bought, so (if) you borrowed three years ago at a rate of two percent, let's say rates can be now seven percent, it doesn't affect you.

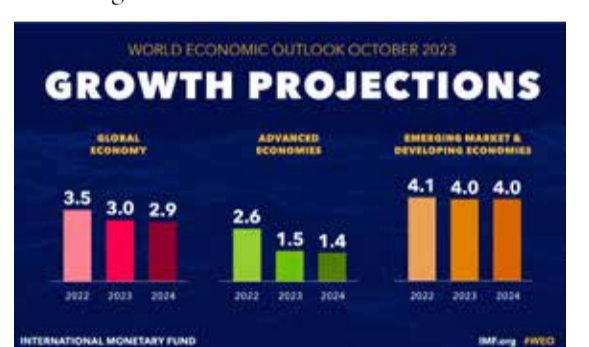
Finally, there is a question of how much fiscal policy might be doing. What we're seeing in the euro area is (that) a lot of support was put in place during the pandemic and during the energy crisis. The energy prices have been coming down, the pandemic is behind us, so a lot of that support is being withdrawn. In the US, the deficits are still very large.

The IMF forecasts a 0.5 percent contraction in Germany this year. Is there a long-term concern? -

In the case of Germany there is a combination of two very powerful forces right now. One we've al-

ready mentioned when we talked about the difference between the euro area and the US, which is the energy shock, and in the context of an economy that was very dependent on the manufacturing industries—very energy intensive and dependent on energy supplies from Russia. So that has been a big shock for the German economy.

But then you have the tightening of monetary policy and on top of that in an inflation context, the loss of purchasing power, the cost-of-living crisis. So all of these things together, explain, we have relatively weak manufacturing, we have relatively weak consumption, we have relatively weak investment. I think this is an economy that has a lot of resources. It has fiscal space. It has the ability to adapt. It has tremendous industries and technology, it has skilled labour, so this is this is not necessarily something that is a concern.



You have lowered China's growth outlook due to a real estate crisis. Does the government need to do more to prevent a worsening situation?

It's obviously an important factor behind our revised estimate for 2023. This has the potential, if it's not addressed, to weigh on Chinese economic activity even more. It's a very substantial component of aggregate activity in China. You could have then worries about the financial health for the banks that are making loans to the developers who are right now sitting on a number of properties that they cannot sell, or cannot complete and deliver the units that they have already pre-sold because they're facing liquidity problems. So that could then spread more broadly into the Chinese economy. You could have problems for local authorities because they generate quite a bit of their revenues from land sales.

This is already a real estate crisis, but it could become something even bigger. So that requires, in our view, very forceful, and very sizable action by the government to really bring back confidence in the sector, to guarantee financial stability to resolve and take care of the developers facing financial difficulties. And until that is done, then, you know, at that point, maybe the sector would be able to rebound, but that will require quite a bit of adjustment. - AFP

Struggling Germany headed for deeper recession, says IMF

FRANKFURT: Germany will suffer a deeper recession than previously thought, the International Monetary Fund said Tuesday, predicting that Europe's traditional growth engine will be the worst performing major economy in 2023. The German economy, buffeted by high inflation and a manufacturing slump, is now expected to shrink by 0.5 percent this year, the IMF said. It had forecast a 0.3-percent contraction back in July.

Europe's largest economy will be the only one of the Group of Seven rich nations not to grow this year, the updated forecasts confirm. Germany faces multiple headwinds including "weakness in interest-rate-sensitive sectors and slower trading-partner demand", the IMF said in its latest report.

The country—which tipped into a recession at the start of 2023 and stagnated in the second quarter—is headed for another "slight economic contraction" in the second half of the year, according to the IMF. The Washington-based institute sees Germany rebounding in 2024, but downgraded its expectations to 0.9 percent growth from July's 1.3 percent. Germany's troubles are set to act as a drag on eurozone growth, with the IMF slightly lowering its 2023 forecast for the 20-nation currency club to 0.7 percent growth.

There was better news for eurozone heavyweight France where a "catch-up in industrial production and external demand" led the IMF to predict 1.0 percent expansion for 2023, up from 0.8 percent previously. But fellow G7 member Italy, grappling with inflation stubbornly above the eurozone average, saw its growth prediction slashed by 0.4 percentage points to 0.7 percent. Elevated energy prices linked to Russia's war in Ukraine, higher borrowing costs as a result of the European Central Bank's interest rate hikes to cool inflation, and weaker demand from China are all taking a toll on export powerhouse Germany. The end of cheap Russian gas imports has rattled Germany's energy-intensive sectors in particular, provoking much hand-wringing about a potential de-industrialization as companies mull whether to move production abroad.

At the same time, the European Union's most populous nation is confronting structural problems such as an ageing society and a shortage of skilled workers. The anxiety has prompted some media outlets to speculate about Germany's re-emergence as "the sick man of Europe", a label from the late 1990s when the country grappled with the costly fallout of reunification.

The German government will unveil its own autumn forecasts on Wednesday. According to media reports,

Latest World Economic Outlook Growth Projections

	2022	2023	2024
World Output	3.8	3.0	2.9
Advanced Economies	2.6	1.5	1.4
United States	2.1	2.1	1.5
Euro Area	3.3	0.7	1.2
Germany	1.8	-0.5	0.9
France	2.5	1.0	1.3
Italy	3.7	0.7	0.7
Spain	5.8	2.5	1.7
Japan	1.0	2.0	1.0
United Kingdom	4.1	0.5	0.6
Canada	3.4	1.3	1.6
Other Advanced Economies	2.6	1.8	2.2
Emerging Market and Developing Economies	4.1	4.0	4.0
Emerging and Developing Asia	4.5	5.2	4.8
China	3.0	5.0	4.2
India	7.2	6.3	6.3
Emerging and Developing Europe	0.8	2.4	2.2
Russia	-2.1	2.2	1.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	4.1	2.3	2.3
Brazil	2.9	3.1	1.5
Mexico	3.9	3.2	2.1
Middle East and Central Asia	5.6	2.0	3.4
Morocco	1.3	2.4	3.6
Saudi Arabia	8.7	0.8	4.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.0	3.3	4.0
Nigeria	3.3	2.9	3.1
South Africa	1.9	0.9	1.8
Memorandum			
Emerging Market and Middle-Income Economies	4.0	4.0	3.9
Low-Income Developing Countries	5.2	4.0	5.1

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook, October 2023

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Berlin will say it now expects the economy to shrink by 0.4 percent in 2023, a sharp downgrade from the spring forecast of 0.4 percent expansion. Economy Minister Robert Habeck has said urgent action was needed to exit the doldrums. "We need to remove obstacles to investment, clear out the jungle of bureaucracy and make things easier for entrepreneurs," he said late last month. Hoping to boost those efforts, the government has unveiled a 211-billion-euro (\$223 billion) "climate and transformation fund" to support companies investing in modernization and boost the green energy transition. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has also announced a "Germany pact" that includes measures to speed up digitization and approval processes for construction projects.

ECB board member Isabel Schnabel, who is German, said the country's "long-term potential growth" hinged on how it tackled the various challenges. "Germany has managed to transform itself in the past and I am confident that it will be able to do so today," she told a Croatian newspaper last week. - AFP

the Zionist-Gaza conflict. Europe's main stock markets jumped more than 1.6 percent in afternoon trading stage, and after a largely upbeat session in Asia.

Wall Street stocks pushed modestly higher at the opening bell, adding to gains posted on Monday. Oil prices dropped, having soared Monday after Hamas fighters unexpectedly launched a deadly attack on Zionist entity, stoking fear of spreading unrest in the crude-rich Middle East. "Equity markets are bouncing back on Tuesday after a risk-averse start to the week, buoyed... by some promising Fed commentary," said analyst Craig Erlam at trading firm OANDA.

"It would appear the recent surge in bond yields hasn't gone unnoticed at the central bank, to the extent that Fed officials are coming across as less hawkish in their views."

Despite simmering geopolitical tensions, sentiment was helped by Friday's forecast-busting US jobs report that also showed wage gains slowing—a so-called "Goldilocks" scenario in which the data was neither too weak nor too strong. The upbeat mood was boosted Monday after Fed Vice Chair Philip Jefferson said the recent spike in US Treasury yields to multi-year highs could provide

the necessary restraint on credit that would be achieved by higher interest rates.

"Looking ahead, I will remain cognizant of the tightening in financial conditions through higher bond yields and will keep that in mind as I assess the future path of policy," he told a National Association for Business Economics conference in Dallas. His comments echoed those of Dallas Fed President Lorie Logan, who suggested that if bond market costs were on the rise that "could do some of the work of cooling the economy for us, leaving less need for additional monetary policy tightening." - AFP

Global stocks rise, oil dips after surge

LONDON: Major equity markets advanced Tuesday after top Federal Reserve officials suggested a recent spike in US Treasury yields could prevent more interest rate hikes, while oil dipped one day after spiking on

Business

China's Belt and Road generated over \$2tn in contracts: Beijing

Participating countries owe over \$300bn to China's Eximbank

BEIJING: China announced on Tuesday its Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure project had generated two trillion dollars in contracts around the world, equivalent in size to some of the world's biggest economies.

A white paper from China's State Council also said countries participating in the initiative owe more than \$300 billion to the Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank), a figure one expert said was likely understated but which lays bare the huge debts incurred in the global infrastructure initiative. China is hailing this month the 10th anniversary of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has seen Beijing pour a trillion dollars into projects around the world in a defining geopolitical project for President Xi Jinping.

But critics have long accused China of luring lower-income countries into debt traps by offering huge, unaffordable loans. Beijing said Tuesday the value of signed construction contracts with partners now totaled two trillion dollars—roughly the size of the economy of Russia or Canada.

And "the actual turnover of Chinese con-

tractors reached \$1.3 trillion", it said. It also said the balance of loans for BRI projects from Eximbank—a key BRI creditor—now totaled 2.2 trillion yuan (\$307.4 billion). That total covers "130-plus participating countries and driving more than \$400 billion of investment and more than \$2 trillion of trade", the white paper said, suggesting an average of \$2.4 billion in debts per country.

The paper did not detail which countries owe the most, nor the kind of interest rates they are expected to pay. One expert told AFP the figure, while large, was likely "vastly underestimated". "There have been other academic research papers that have written on these hidden debts that could add up to \$800 billion," Niva Yau, a non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, said. "We simply don't have information about these projects and how these figures have added up," she said.

'Real gains'

Eximbank has financed major transport and energy projects across the BRI and has been linked to foreign loan plans ev-

erywhere from Africa to Central Asia. Beijing's Silk Road Fund—established to help fund BRI projects—in turn has "signed agreements on 75 projects with committed investment of about \$22 billion", the white paper said. China's State Council hailed the BRI on Tuesday as having "delivered real gains to participating countries".

However, many of its partners are increasingly wary about the cost involved. Italy, the only one of the group of leading developed democracies to sign up to the investment scheme, said last month it was considering opting out of the deal. Beijing is due to host the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation this month, with Russian President Vladimir Putin set to attend in his first visit to China since his invasion of Ukraine. China is yet to confirm when the forum will take place.

"We welcome countries and partners actively participating in the Belt and Road Initiative to come to Beijing to discuss cooperation plans and seek common development," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said last month. — AFP



BEIJING: China's Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure project had generated two trillion dollars in contracts around the world. — AFP

Country Garden says might not meet all debt obligations

BEIJING: Debt-saddled Chinese property giant Country Garden said Tuesday that it did not expect to meet all of its offshore payment obligations in time as it edges towards a potential default. Country Garden—one of China's biggest property developers—had racked up debts estimated at 1.43 trillion yuan (\$196 billion) by the end of 2022.

Its cash flow problems have ignited fears that it could collapse with consequences for China's economy, which is already suffering from record-high youth unemployment, flagging consumption and a broader crisis in the real estate sector. Country Garden, which was already formally at risk of default in September, last month repaid \$22.5 million in interest on loans at the last minute during a 30-day grace period. It then negotiated the rescheduling of several repayments with creditors, with several more deadlines looming over the coming weeks.

The firm said Tuesday it had missed a payment of HK\$470 million (\$60 million). The group has a grace period of 30 days to avoid a potential default. But in a filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, the firm said it "expects that it will not be able to meet all of its offshore payment obligations when due or within the relevant grace periods". "Such non-payment may lead to relevant creditors of the Group demanding acceleration of payment of the relevant indebtedness owed to them or pursuing enforcement action," the firm warned.

It promised to develop a "holistic solution in a fair and equitable manner" in repaying its debt obligations. To that end, it said it has hired financial advisers "to evaluate the capital structure and liquidity" of its subsidiaries.

"The Company intends to continue to cooperate and engage in dialogue with all creditors to reach a feasible solution as soon as practicable," it said. It went on to ask "for patience from creditors" as it seeks to "assess the current challenges". — AFP

Bank of England says UK resilient to financial shocks

LONDON: Britain's banking system remains strong and UK business has shown itself resilient to higher interest rates, the Bank of England said Tuesday in its latest assessment of the economy.

Its conclusions follow a survey carried out by the BoE's Financial Policy Committee, in which respondents said the main risks to stability were cyber attacks along with geopolitical unrest and high inflation. "The outlook for global economic growth remains weak in the near-term. A number of risks could weaken growth further. For example, if inflation proves more persistent, interest rates may need to rise further," the BoE said.

"The UK banking system remains strong enough to support households and businesses, even if economic conditions are worse than we expect. "The UK banking system has large capital buffers and other resources to absorb any potential losses, or outflows of cash," it added.

Economists say Britain is at risk of tipping into recession after the Bank of England's multiple interest-rate rises since the end of 2021 aimed at cooling inflation, which remains elevated. The BoE cautioned that disruptions to market-based finance, such as equity and debt markets, "have the potential to increase the cost and reduce the availability of finance for both UK businesses and households". The BoE's latest Systemic Risk Survey gathered responses from 56 firms in August and September. It found that businesses "remain confident in the stability of the UK financial system and reported a similar level of confidence to" the results of the equivalent survey in the first half of 2023. — AFP

Gulf Bank participates in seminar organized by INJAZ Kuwait

KUWAIT: As part of its strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, and as part of its continuous efforts to support and motivate youth, Gulf Bank participated in the recent seminar titled, INJAZ Talks, in the presence of the Chief Data & Innovation Officer at Gulf Bank, Mai Bader Al-Owaish.

Organized by INJAZ Kuwait, the seminar aimed to provide success models that inspire and motivate young people to engage in the job market, by reviewing the journey of many officials and leaders and their career experiences. Throughout the seminar, Al-Owaish reviewed her academic and professional experiences to young people approaching the job market, where she answered their questions, and pointed to the great differences between university and practical life, and how to smoothly transition from one stage to another.

Al-Owaish further indicated that she is one of the many examples of Gulf Bank's pioneering experience



Mai Bader Al-Owaish

in empowering women, which contributed to many women obtaining leadership positions, where their percentage reached 28 percent out of the total of those positions, which is one of the largest percentages in Kuwait's banking sector.

Gulf Bank's participation is part of its ongoing strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, that spans over 17 years, where a variety of effective training programs were provided for youth. This stems from Gulf Banks' continuous endeavors to support Kuwaiti youth, who represent one of the main pillars in its 2025 strategy and in the Kuwait Vision 2035.

The Job Shadowing program is one of INJAZ's programs that align with Gulf Bank's sustainability initiatives, that aims to support youth, by helping them better understand the real work environment, post-university years. Furthermore, a number of young people who participated in the seminar, stated that the various experiences they heard helped

them form a clearer career vision: as they were experiences shared by officials working in major institutions, that they aspire to work for in the near future. It is noteworthy that the successful partnership between Gulf Bank and INJAZ Kuwait, has resulted in training about 26,000 male and female students during the academic years of 2022 and 2023, covering various academic levels ranging from primary to university levels, including fresh graduates. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

Myanmar truckers slog on as conflict clogs trade highway

MIYAWADDY, Myanmar: Standing beside his cargo of Thai fruit and furniture, truck driver Ko Cho steels himself for a journey to Myanmar's Yangon that will demand bribes, dodging landslides and navigating a raging civil war.

The commercial hub is just 400 kilometers (250 miles) away, but a round trip from Myawaddy on the Thai border can take more than 10 days of slogging through checkpoints and paying backhanders to the military and its allies.

The main route linking Myanmar with its second biggest trading partner is part of the United Nations-backed Asia Highway project to create a road network from Tokyo to Istanbul. But this section of "AHI" runs through Karen state, home to a decades-old conflict between ethnic rebels and the military that has escalated since the generals' coup in 2021. Air strikes and artillery barrages regularly fall near the road, further choking a major artery of an economy on life support since the putsch.

"When we hear the gunfire is very close, we immediately stop and hide under the truck," said 43-year-old driver Ko Zaw, a pseudonym. Ko Cho, also a pseudonym, was waiting at a gas station when AFP spoke to him in September, travelling in a group of five trucks for safety.

"We have to stop and wait on the road when there is a battle," he said. "It's happened twice this month." Drivers always have ID cards, licences, cash and



KAWKAREIK, Myanmar: This photo taken on September 27, 2023 shows a line of trucks and buses on the Yangon-Myawaddy section of the Asia Highway road near Kawkareik township. — AFP

phones at the ready in case something happens. Aung Htoo, a truck owner who works the road, told AFP. "Because we can't turn the truck back, we have to leave and run away."

Even getting onto the highway is a task. In the border town of Myawaddy, truck owners pay a fee of 120,000 kyat (\$65) just to "quickly" enter the loading zone where their cargoes are inspected. Aung Htoo said. "It can take one month to enter the zone if we don't pay," he said. "All cars pay." Myawaddy, a drug and human trafficking hub largely controlled by a junta-allied militia, has been caught up in the junta's raging conflict with its opponents.

In September, anti-junta fighters used drones to drop bombs on a government compound, killing five officials and wounding 11 policemen. Once a truck is safely out on the road, "checkpoints" run by the

military or its militia allies demand fees of roughly 150,000 kyat (\$75) per truck per journey to Yangon, Aung Htoo said. From Myawaddy, the road winds up towards monsoon-soaked hills that periodically shed rocks and earth onto the tarmac, burying parts of the route for days.

Passenger buses crawl up inclines or hiss and lurch around washed-out corners, English-language lettering on their sides announcing "Man of the Year" or "Shopaholic". At one corner, an 18-wheeler truck lies tipped over, its crew waiting while a recovery vehicle works. Every two hours or so there is a checkpoint, Ko Zaw said. "We have to pay everyone everywhere—on the road, on the bridges, at toll gates, at the trade zones." If they try to negotiate the price, he said, the drivers are told "go back if you don't have money". — AFP

UK Labour party's new love affair with business

LIVERPOOL: After years of disenchantment, British business leaders flocked to this week's Labour conference, signaling a reset in relations between the centre-left party and a corporate community scalded by the economic policies of the ruling Conservatives. Several hundred business bigwigs met and talked to opposition leader Keir Starmer on Monday at a business forum that was sold out at the annual gathering in Liverpool, northwest England.

"If we do come into government, you will be coming into government with us," Starmer said in front of representatives from Microsoft, Ikea and energy supplier Octopus, among others.

The 61-year-old, whose party is well ahead of the Tories in opinion polls ahead of a general election expected next year, talked up the idea of a "partnership" between the business world and Labour.

Starmer has brought his party back to the centre since succeeding left-winger Jeremy Corbyn as leader in 2020 following a landslide defeat to the Tories at the last election in December 2019. Since then, pan-

dem lockdowns, Brexit and the Ukraine conflict sent shockwaves through the British economy, with stagnating growth and high inflation triggering a cost-of-living crisis for Britons. The Conservatives are seen as having failed to manage the economy well, with unrealistic spending plans unnerving the markets and poisoning relations with the business community, which appears ready to reengage with Labour.

"I think they understand the value of economic activity and the need to do more in Britain," Martin Land, director of renewable energy project Mersey Tidal Power told AFP. Land, and others, exchanged views with several Labour lawmakers in Liverpool. He said he was won over by the party's commitment to "skills" and its desire to strengthen trade relations with the European Union, which have been complicated since Brexit. A survey carried out by communications agency Lodestone in September found that 70 percent of business leaders expect Labour to win the next general election and 64 percent would see their arrival in Downing Street as a good thing. "The relationship between Labour and business historically has been volatile. It's been often one of suspicion," which peaked under Corbyn's leadership, said Lodestone director Tom King.

Although business leaders are still waiting to hear more about the concrete measures Labour intends to introduce, they believe the party will intervene in



LIVERPOOL: Britain's main opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer reacts after a protester threw glitter on him at the start of his keynote address to delegates on the third day of the annual Labour Party conference in Liverpool, northwest England, on October 10, 2023. — AFP

the economy in a way that "will improve the business landscape as opposed to harming it", particularly in terms of the environment, added King. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's announcement last month that he was putting the brakes on a number of measures intended to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, including delaying the ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars, was coolly received by industry, particularly motor manufacturers. — AFP



Cosplayers showcase art at ALGERIAN COMICS FESTIVAL



Cosplayers pose for pictures during the Algerian International Comics Festival in Algiers. —AFP photos

'The Exorcist: Believer' takes possession of box office with \$27.2 million opening

The Exorcist: Believer" drove out all foes at the box office, but its numbers didn't entirely make heads spin. Facing competition from no major new releases, the latest resurrection of the demonic franchise brought in \$27.2 million in North America in its opening weekend for Universal

The Mighty Movie," was a distant second, with \$11.8 million, and has earned \$38.9 million after two weekends for Paramount Pictures. Another horror sequel, "Saw X," was third for Lionsgate Films, with \$8.2 million, and has brought in \$32.6 million after two weekends. Horror films made up four of the

just two months after the death of the original film's director, William Friedkin. Directed by David Gordon Green, who has become a legacy sequel specialist after helming a trilogy of "Halloween" films, "The Exorcist: Believer" stars "Hamilton" actor Leslie Odom Jr, with Lidya Jewett as his 13-year-old daughter. The film got poor reviews — managing a critics score of just 23% on Rotten Tomatoes. Jake Coyle of The Associated Press was more charitable than most in his review, giving it two stars out of four for its lead performances and sure-handed direction but saying it "never manages anything like the deep terror of the original."

The release of "The Exorcist" was moved up a week to avoid competing with the juggernaut of next weekend's concert film, "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour." "I think they made a good call actually," Dergarabedian said. "All the oxygen is going to be sucked out of the room." The storm of Swifties in cinemas could make for a \$100 million weekend and set several new precedents for concert movies. "This is on an order of magnitude beyond anything we've seen," Dergarabedian said. The weekend finally saw "Barbie" fall from the box office top 10 for the first time since its July 21 release, after well over \$600 million in domestic earnings and more than \$1.3 billion globally.



Pictures and Blumhouse Productions, according to studio estimates Sunday. That was more than the weekend take of the next three films combined. But while it nearly earned back its reported budget of \$30 million in just a few days, the take for "The Exorcist: Believer" was underwhelming after the two companies paid \$400 million in 2021 for the rights to a new trilogy. Last week's top film, "Paw Patrol: The Movie," was a distant second, with \$11.8 million, and has earned \$38.9 million after two weekends for Paramount Pictures. Another horror sequel, "Saw X," was third for Lionsgate Films, with \$8.2 million, and has brought in \$32.6 million after two weekends. Horror films made up four of the

top 10, and they could see some sustained numbers as Halloween comes closer. "It seems like the demand for the horror genre by audiences is never ending," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. "The communal theater experience is tailor-made for it."

The new "Exorcist" was released just shy of the 50th anniversary of the original horror classic, and it comes



US singer/songwriter Billie Eilish and her brother US singer-songwriter Finneas O'Connell arrive for the world premiere of "Barbie" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. —AFP

Billie Eilish's journey celebrated in new comic book

She is only 21 but Billie Eilish already has a comic book published about her life, highlighting her journey from young dancer to Oscar-winning songwriter. Publisher TidalWave Comics has added the American popstar to its "Female Force" series that celebrates "prominent and influential authors, business executives,

entertainers, journalists, politicians, and activists." In the 22-page comic book, readers will learn about Eilish's transition from dance to music and the collaboration process with her brother Finneas. The comic was released on October 10 in digital and print formats.



Oromo people gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi during the celebration of "Irreecha", the Oromo people thanksgiving holiday in Bishoftu, Ethiopia. — AFP photos

Ethiopia's Oromo people celebrate festival once denied

Tens of thousands of Oromos gathered Sunday at a lake near the Ethiopian capital for a once-banned celebration that today doubles as a sounding board for political and ethnic demands. Draped in traditional colors including the red, white and black of the Oromo flag, crowds descended on the shores of Lake Hora Arsadi, 50 kilometers (30 miles) southeast of Addis Ababa, for the annual Irreecha festival.

To mark the passage of seasons, attendees old and young at Irreecha dip flowers into the lake and sprinkle themselves with the blessed water, amid traditional songs and dancing in colorful regalia. The Oromo are almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims. Many refer to god as Waaqa, and some still practice local beliefs that revolve around this ancestral life-giving deity. In recent decades, there has been a revival of Oromo identity long suppressed under successive waves of Ethiopian rulers and traditions like Irreecha, which was long banned, have re-emerged.

'Our strength'

Tola Micha, wearing a tie striped in Oromo colors, remembered when Irreecha resumed in the late 1990s after the fall of the military-Marxist Derg regime in 1991. In the beginning there were "a few hundred" in attendance: "Now we're in numbers, and I am proud of it," the 52-year-old said. "Irreecha is our fist. It represents our strength." Sabkebar said Irreecha was a "major" festival for his people but despite the celebrations, he did not forget there were "still many issues which remain unaddressed regarding the Oromo".

"The past generation has paid a sacrifice so that our generation can come here and celebrate it," he said. Among the crowd, political chants peppered the lively singing and dancing. "We are marginal-

ized!" rose one refrain, while others spoke of a desire for greater respect as a people, and concerns over Oromos in prison. Others cried for an end to the violent armed conflict raging in Oromia, a restive region and homeland of the Oromo.

Oromia is plagued by armed violence and anti-government insurgencies, and has witnessed ethnic massacres in recent years. In 2018, Abiy Ahmed became the first Oromo to lead Ethiopia, and many anticipated greater representation and respect for a long-marginalized people. But many Oromo have complained of continuing political and economic persecution even under the leadership of one of their own.

Many celebrating at Irreecha were at pains to avoid discussing the thornier issue of politics, but echoed wider concerns about Oromo identity and their place in Ethiopia. "We can't say the question of the Oromo people is fully addressed, but it is better than before," said Kiya Tadessa, a 24-year-old NGO worker.

Ababa Korsaa, a 30-year-old accountant, said the right to celebrate Irreecha "wasn't given to us freely and many shed their blood and sacrifice was paid". "Even today, we cannot say we are fully liberated and there are many issues unaddressed," he said. "However, it's partly better, to come here and celebrate our culture freely." —AFP



Oromo people dressed in traditional attires gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.

Representing around a third of Ethiopia's 120 million people, the Oromo are the largest of 80 distinct groups that make up the vast and ethnically-diverse nation in the Horn of Africa. "The Oromo people come to the lake to give thanks to god for the change of the rainy season, of winter to spring," said Sabkebar Gezu, a 35-year-old small business owner.



Oromo people dressed in traditional attires gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.



Oromo people dressed in traditional attires gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.



Oromo women dressed in traditional clothing are seen during the celebration of "Irreecha".



Oromo people dressed in traditional attires gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.



Oromo people gather on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.



Oromo people spray water on themselves at lake Hora Arsadi.



Revellers enjoy a boat ride on lake Hora Arsadi.



An Oromo man dressed in a traditional attire poses on the shores of lake Hora Arsadi.



Women dressed in traditional clothing gather for the celebration of Irreecha.

Lifestyle



In this photo South Korean actor Jung Yoon-suk (left), director of 'Dear Jinri', answers questions during a guest visit event, after a screening of the film at the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) in Busan. — AFP photos

'Dear Jinri' bears witness to late K-pop singer's truth

A new documentary featuring a late K-pop star's final interview unveils complex truths about South Korea's notoriously brutal music industry while highlighting her defiance of pressure to conform to societal norms. "Dear Jinri", which premiered at the Busan International Film Festival, revolves around singing star Sulli's last Netflix project, an unfinished film that included an in-depth interview.

Born Choi Jin-ri, Sulli took her own life in 2019 at age 25, after a long struggle with online bullying. The interview in the film—raw, powerful and heart-breaking—has never been previously seen. What Sulli shares in that conversation raises "many critical issues in our society," director Jung Yoon-suk said after the film's BIFF screening Saturday evening.

"These can be seen as issues related to women, or they could be problems concerning the vulnerable in our society, or related to matters of equality," he said. Sulli, who began her career as a child actress at age 11, made her debut in 2009 for f(x), which quickly became one of K-pop's top girl groups. Known for behavior considered controversial in South Korea—including refusing to wear a bra in public—she faced relentless online bullying and was frequently targeted by sexually abusive comments.

The film also explores the singer's



In this photo South Korean actor Jung Yoon-suk (right), director of 'Dear Jinri', answers questions during a guest visit event, after a screening of the film at the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) in Busan.

lonely childhood and battles with self-perception as a woman in a world that can be intensely focused on appearance. "Since you are born as a pretty woman, you don't have to know anything," Sulli says she was told. But, she adds: "It's obnoxious to say your life was hard because you are a pretty woman."

The well-documented pressures of the K-pop world are also spotlighted, with Sulli explaining how she was told her goal was to be "the highest quality product". She likens her experience to that of the protagonist in Luc Besson's 1990 "La Femme Nikita", who undergoes rigorous and vicious training to

become a programmed assassin, completely cut off from the outside world.

It seemed as if people "couldn't recognize that we were human beings", Sulli says in the film. The interview is punctuated by frequent pauses as the camera lingers silently on its subject, the pain and sorrow palpable on her face. Audible sobs from the audience could be heard throughout the screening.

A self-aware artist

Suicide is the leading cause of death among South Koreans aged 10 to 39 and occurs at an unusually high rate, official figures show. Several other young

K-pop stars have died of suspected suicide in recent years, including Goo Hara, Jonghyun and Moonbin. The incidents have prompted calls for increased mental health support for young people in the industry.

Sulli's response to director Jung's question about the online bullying she endured—specifically, her decision to grant legal forgiveness to one of the perpetrators—is arguably one of the most poignant and revealing scenes in the movie. She also candidly discusses feminism—a topic still controversial in socially conservative South Korea—saying she "rooted for women who spoke out", even when their views did not align with hers.

In the end, the film paints a portrait of a contemplative, resilient figure who, in the ways she could, resisted the pressure to conform, striving instead to forge her own understanding of the world and her place in it. The film takes its title from Sulli's legal name, Jin-ri, which means truth in Korean.

"It was incredibly important to view this person not just as a celebrity or an idol, but as someone who possesses self-awareness as an artist," Jung said. "It seemed like the movie would be meaningful as the truth itself, just as (her) name implies."—AFP

Final series of 'The Crown' set to air later this year

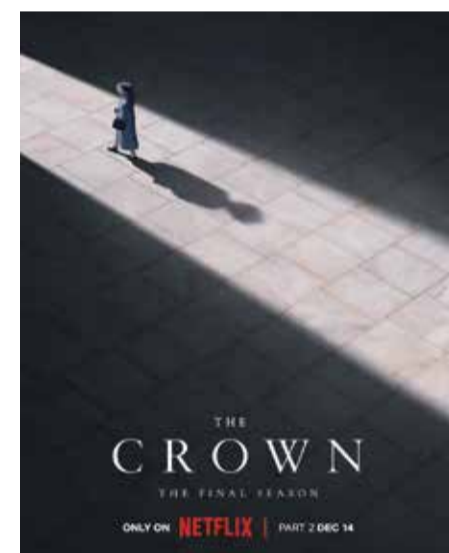
The much-anticipated final season of the global hit series "The Crown" will be released in two parts later this year, streaming giant Netflix announced on Monday. The first installment of the wildly successful historical drama's sixth season will be available to stream on November 16, while the second and final part will be released four weeks later on December 14.

"The Crown", which first aired on Netflix in late 2016, is a fictionalized version of the British royal family but broadly based around real historical events. It has amassed a loyal audience around the world, won dozens of top awards -- including 21 Emmys -- and stoked controversy in Britain over claims of untrue depictions of the royals.

The US streaming behemoth announced news of the series release dates with a montage of clips showing the actresses who have played the late Queen Elizabeth II paired with their scripted lines on her views of the role. "It is not a choice. It is a duty," her character says, with Netflix reiterating that line on X, formerly Twitter, alongside the release dates and the video.

The coming season is expected to look at the 1997 Paris car accident which led to the deaths of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed -- the son of late business tycoon Mohamed Al Fayed -- and their driver Henri Paul. The couple were seen getting to know each other in season five.

It is also expected to show the premiership of Tony Blair, and the early relationship between Prince William and the then-Kate Middleton. The previous season of "The Crown" covered the early and mid-1990s, a turbulent period for the royal family that included the divorce of now-King Charles III and Princess Diana.



It prompted a backlash among some in Britain, with one scene depicting the heir-to-the-throne attempting to draw former prime minister John Major into a conspiracy to force the abdication of his mother. Critics have said the series are "full of lies". Its makers have rejected the criticism, insisting that it has always been presented as a drama based on historical events.—AFP

Book Review

Poet recalls stormy life growing up Rastafari in Jamaica and her struggle to break free

It's not unusual for an autobiography to chart a person's passage from rags to riches, ignorance to enlightenment, or bondage to freedom. It is unusual to find one as powerful and disturbing as Safiya Sinclair's debut memoir, "How to Say Babylon," which has already drawn comparisons to Tara Westover's "Educated" and Mary Karr's "The Liars' Club." Sinclair, an award-winning poet who teaches creative writing at Arizona State University, grew up in extreme poverty in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in the shadow of the luxury hotels that cater to wealthy tourists. Her father, a reggae musician, was a militant follower of a strict Rastafari sect. Her mother, selfless, loving and subservient to her father, was Safiya's lifeline, introducing her at a young age to poetry, which became her ticket out.

Sinclair writes of a chaotic yet magical childhood, moving constantly but always surrounded by lush tropical forests and broad vistas of sea and sky, which later gave her the sounds and imagery of her poems. "It was here, on our verdant hillside, that my mother first taught me the poetry of greenery. She showed me how to suckle language from each bloom."

As a girl, she revered her father, nodding "Yes, Daddy," whenever he delivered one of his endless rants about the evils of Babylon -- Rasta shorthand for the white, western, Christian world -- but her childhood idyll ended when she started menstruating and he deemed her unclean.

Drake fires back at 'weirdos' criticizing his friendship with Millie Bobby Brown

Five years after their friendship first stirred up controversy, Drake is defending his relationship with Millie Bobby Brown in "Another Late Night," a song off his new album For All The Dogs. Drake is saying there are stranger things than his friendship with Millie Bobby Brown. In "Another Late Night," one of the songs off his new album For All The Dogs, which was released on October 6, the 36-year-old addresses his friendship with the actress, who is 17 years his junior. "Weirdos in my comments talkin' 'bout some Millie Bobby, look," he raps. "Bring them jokes up to the gang, we get to really flockin' / Open up that s—t, it's jaw droppin', really shockin'." Attention was first drawn to the Degraasi alum and Enola Holmes star back in 2018, when Millie revealed that she and Drake had a close friendship, which included him giving her advice on boys.

"I met him in Australia," Millie, who was 14 at the time, told Access Holly-

wood. "And he's honestly so fantastic. And a great friend and a great role model, you know we text—we just texted each other the other day and he was like, 'I miss you so much', and I was like, 'I miss you more!'" "Why u gotta make a lovely friendship your headline?" the Netflix star wrote at the time. "U guys are weird... for real. I'm lucky to have people in the business extend their time to help me further my career and offer their wisdom and guidance. I'm very blessed to have amazing people in my life. U don't get to choose that for me." She finished her message with a plea for everyone to move on. "It's nice to have people who understand what I do," she noted. "Now get back to talking about real problems in this world other than my friendships... jeez."—www.eonline.com



Hollywood writers sign off on new deal

Hollywood writers overwhelmingly voted to approve a hard-fought new deal with studios, their union said Monday, officially ending one of the industry's longest ever strikes. 99 percent of WGA members have voted in favor of ratifying the contract, allowing them to return to work on improved terms, said the Writers Guild of America on social media. Approval by the union's 11,500-odd members had been widely seen as a near-certainty.

Last month, after 148 days on strike, WGA negotiators reached a deal with the likes of Netflix and Disney, achieving better pay, greater protections from artificial intelligence, minimum staffing levels and more. Most writers returned to work nearly two weeks ago, in anticipation of the deal being ratified. Still, film and television productions in Hollywood are yet to resume in earnest, as the far larger

Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) representing 160,000 performers remains on strike.

Talks between the studios and SAG-AFTRA, which went on strike in July, finally began last week, and were scheduled to resume Monday. SAG-AFTRA's demands over pay, and limits to the future use of AI, go further than those of the writers. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which represented the industry's biggest studios in talks with the WGA, praised the outcome of the writers' vote. "The AMPTP member companies congratulate the WGA on the ratification of its new contract, which represents meaningful gains and protections for writers," it said in a statement. "It is important progress for our industry that writers are back to work."—AFP



Drake and Millie Bobby Brown

Sports

Cricket set for shot at Olympic glory

'We are delighted that LA28 have recommended cricket for inclusion in the Olympics'

LONDON: Cricket's long Olympic exile could finally come to an end this week when Games chiefs meet in Mumbai to finalize the program for Los Angeles 2028. Twenty-eight sports are already confirmed on the schedule but cricket was one of five new sports formally proposed for inclusion by organizers for the Games on Monday. The International Cricket Council's proposal is for men's and women's Twenty20 competitions—the shortest form of the international game. "We are delighted that LA28 have recommended cricket for inclusion in the Olympics," ICC chairman Greg Barclay said.

"Whilst this is not the final decision, it is a very significant landmark towards seeing cricket at the Olympics for the first time in more than a century."

If it makes the cut, it would be the first time cricket has featured since 1900, when a team from Britain beat a side representing France in Paris. Since then it has been in the Olympic wilderness, in part because cricket itself was quite happy to stand aside from the Games. But in recent years the ICC has made clear it wants to be part of the global showpiece—a move that could turbo-charge the sport and help it exploit new markets. "Our sport is united behind this bid, and we see the Olympics as a part of cricket's long-term future," Barclay said in 2021.

"We have more than a billion fans globally and almost 90 percent of them want to see cricket at the Olympics." The game has had support from the highest places in the Olympic movement. Late ICC president Jacques Rogge said in 2011: "We would

welcome an application. It (cricket) is an important, popular sport and very powerful on television." The current president, Thomas Bach, has also backed the inclusion of cricket, which featured at last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Indian hotbed

This week the IOC executive board is meeting in Mumbai, ahead of a full IOC session from October 15 to October 17, which would effectively rubberstamp the decision. Cricket could not have asked for a better city in which to make its case. The IOC session is being held in one of the hotbeds of the sport as India hosts the men's 50-over World Cup.

Cricket, with its multiple formats and quirky rules, has long been a source of curiosity in areas of the world where it is not played. But the global language of cold, hard cash is easier to understand. The arguments that Olympic cricket would clash with the English season or that the game takes too long look increasingly outdated.

The global calendar is now a mishmash of international cricket, domestic cricket and franchise cricket, with multiple formats jostling for attention. The wildly popular T20 Indian Premier League, which has spawned several other franchise competitions worldwide, means traditional five-day Test cricket, long regarded as the pinnacle of the game, no longer holds sway. The IPL, featuring global superstars, has helped India become the unquestioned economic driving force of cricket, thanks to legions of fans and lucra-



NAVI MUMBAI: The President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Thomas Bach plays cricket at an event to launch the Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP) at the Reliance Foundation Young Champs (RFYC) football academy in Navi Mumbai, in the run up to the upcoming 141st IOC session. — AFP

tive broadcasting deals in a nation where the game is almost a religion. Adding cricket to the Olympic program is an obvious move, financially speaking.

It would tap into the lucrative south Asian market, attracting fans in countries such as India and Pakistan that have not traditionally been strong in the

core Olympic sports. It would also potentially help cricket access millions of dollars of public and corporate funding currently reserved for Games sports. That would benefit emerging cricket nations but could also help cash-strapped established countries such as South Africa. — AFP

Asia gets the lion's share in bowling tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The continent of Asia received the lion's share in the men's and women's singles competition of the World Bowling Championship being held in Kuwait until October 15th as they won the medals of top places except for one European sharing third

place in the men's competitions from Germany Tobias Boerding.

Singapore's Darren Ong claimed Kuwait's World Championship for men, while Malaysia's Natasha Roslan won the women's title as the singles competition concluded on Monday night. Ong's win came at the expense of his compatriot Muhd Jaris Goh in the final match, while Qatar's Ghanim Aboujassoum and Germany's Tobias Boerding shared third place.

Natasha beat her seasoned compatriot Sin Li Jane following a very competitive match while third place was shared by Koreans Hong Hae Ni and Son Hye Rin.

President of IBF and Asian Bowling confederations Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said

the singles competitions were on high technical level, particularly during the advanced rounds. Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah told journalists following the singles awarding ceremony that the organizing committee will continue its efforts to ensure the complete success of the tournament in organization, technically and media wise, and congratulated the winners.

Head of Qatar's Bowling Federation Abdulla Al-Qattan lauded the strong competitions which is an opportunity for Gulf and Arab players to improve, as he pleased with Qatar's Aboujassoum winning third place in the singles.

He said that electing Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah for a third term is the result of the development and improvement of the game during the past two terms.

England's Topley destroys Bangladesh after Malan's ton

DHARAMSALA: Dawid Malan bludgeoned 140 before Reece Topley destroyed the Bangladesh top order on Tuesday as England bounced back from their mauling by New Zealand in their World Cup opener. In-form Malan belted five sixes in his career-best one-day international score and Topley took 4-43 as the defending champions won by 137 runs after piling up 364-9 in Dharamsala.

The total could have been even higher but England subsided from 296-2 in the 40th over due to some disciplined bowling by paceman Shoriful Islam and off-spinner Mahedi Hasan, who took seven wickets between them. Bangladesh shot out of the blocks, with Liton Das hitting three consecutive fours off the first over bowled by Chris Woakes. But they were quickly reduced to 14-2, with Tanzid Hasan and Najmul Hossain Shanto unable to cope with the pace and movement of the towering Topley, who replaced Moeen Ali in the side.

That became 26-3 when captain Shakib Al Hasan was bowled by the paceman and the expensive Woakes then got on the act, enticing an edge from Mehidy Hasan Miraz, with England captain Jos Buttler taking the catch behind the stumps. Despite the carnage, Liton looked untroubled at the other end, reaching his fifty off 38 balls as Bangladesh tried to rebuild. But his fine innings came to an end in the 21st over when he edged a slower ball from Woakes behind to Buttler and departed for 76. Topley celebrated his fourth wicket when Mushfiqur Rahim (51) slashed him to deep third man, into the safe hands of Adil Rashid. As the run rate climbed the result looked increasingly inevitable and the game ceased to be a meaningful contest, petering out despite some late hitting.

Malan stars

Earlier Malan, who has displaced Jason Roy at the top of the order, hit his fourth ODI century in 2023 in an impressive show of timing and power at the picturesque Himalayan ground. His opening partner, Jonny Bairstow, reached a half-century in his 100th ODI but was bowled by Shakib for 52 to leave England 115-1 in the 18th over.

Former Test captain Joe Root picked up where Bairstow left off, signalling his intent with a ramp shot for six. Malan, 36, reached a stylish century in 91 balls before cutting loose in devastating fashion, smashing 20 runs off just four balls during a Mehidy over. Bangladesh, who beat Afghanistan in their opening match in India, finally got the breakthrough they desperately needed when Mahedi bowled Malan. Buttler, with Ben Stokes still injured, promoted himself up the order and briefly flickered before departing for 20 off 10 balls.

Root, who is now England's all-time top-scorer at World Cups, overtaking Graham Gooch, holed out for 82, top-edging a Shoriful ball that was caught by wicketkeeper Mushfiqur. Then Liam Livingstone had his off-stump flattened first ball as England lost momentum. Wickets kept tumbling—Shoriful finished with figures of 3-75 and Mahedi took 4-71 -- but the total proved well beyond Bangladesh. The 10 teams at the World Cup play every other side once in a single round-robin format, with the top four teams progressing to the semi-finals. — AFP



DHARAMSALA: England's Reece Topley bowls during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between England and Bangladesh at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamsala. — AFP



KUWAIT: President of IBF and Asian Bowling confederations Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Singapore's Darren Ong (centre back), Singapore's silver medalist Muhd Jaris Goh (left) and Qatar's Ghanim Aboujassoum and Germany's Tobias Boerding with the bronze.



KUWAIT: The winning Malaysian team.

Red Bull Car Park Drift returns to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Drift enthusiasts and adrenaline junkies have a date with the most exhilarating event of the year, the Red Bull Drift Car Park Drift Kuwait, where drifters will have to prove their mettle through two stages to qualify for this high-octane competition.

On October 27 at 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:00 PM), and across two rounds taking place at Kuwait Motor Town, competitors must navigate a challenging course while simultaneously avoiding obstacles. Each participant will be judged according to a set of nine criteria, with a total of 400 points up for grabs.

A maximum of 120 points will be allocated towards showcasing drifting skills, while the flipper and pendulum challenges will account for up to 60 and 50 points, respectively. In addition, the car's aesthetics and design will make up 40 points, while factors such as tire smoke, car sound, the gate, and

spiral tasks will each contribute a maximum of 20 points toward the final score. The ultimate challenge, the tight 'Box,' where drifters must execute a perfect 'doughnut,' will be worth a hefty 50 points.

However, drifters must also exercise caution as they will lose points if they hit obstacles, drift in the wrong direction, or spin their car. Should they accumulate three penalties in one round, they will be automatically disqualified.

This year marks a significant milestone as Red Bull Car Park Drift Kuwait returns after a three-year hiatus, promising an adrenaline-packed show that's not to be missed. The event is in partnership with Red Bull Mobile by Zain, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babbain Co (AABC), the exclusive authorized dealer of Nissan in Kuwait, Acqua Eva, and Kuwait Motor Town, Dunlop, and Al Babbain Auto and will be attended by renowned figures in the world of drifting, including Red Bull Athletes, Abdo Feghali, Brian Capper, and Sean Garnier.

For those who want to participate in this event, registration is now open. Secure your spot and be part of the 2023 Red Bull Car Park Drift Kuwait by visiting redbull.com/mea-en/events/red-bull-car-park-drift-kuwait

Afghanistan hope Rashid 'delivers' against India

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi hopes leg-spin wizard Rashid Khan "delivers" against India at the World Cup on Wednesday as they attempt to stay on track after an opening defeat in the tournament.

The Afghans were completely outplayed by Bangladesh, losing by six wickets after being bowled out for just 156 in Dharamsala on Saturday. The 25-year-old Rashid, who has 172 wickets in 95 ODI matches, went wicketless in that match but remains Afghanistan's key bowler.

"Rashid is the best bowler in ODI and T20s, so whatever the opposition is doing, we don't care about that," said Shahidi. "Like how they want to play Rashid, but for us the important thing is how he has planned against the opposition. So that matters for us."

Shahidi added: "He has the quality and whenever it's his day, he can do anything against the opposition, so we are expecting and we are hopeful that he delivers in tomorrow's game." Shahidi said, however, spin alone will not win them matches.

"I made a statement at the beginning that we will play good cricket as a batting side. We have a good spin bowling attack, but only one department can't win you games," Shahidi told reporters. "In the Bangladesh game, I know we didn't do well batting, but as a team we have that belief that we can come back in the next game and throughout the tournament. So the belief is there and the talent is there and we will try to move on."

Playing India at home comes with added pressure and Shahidi said the Afghans will not be overwhelmed by an expected packed house at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. "When it's the opposition's home, there will be crowd pressure," said Shahidi. "Especially in India, there are a lot of expectations that the stadium will be packed but as a team our talks are like we have to make these things simple. We need to focus on our own game and try to deliver our own game." The two teams have only played each other on three occasions in the 50-over format with India winning two and one game ending in a tie. — AFP



JEDDAH: File photo shows Ahmad Daham performing during Red Bull Car Park Drift World Final in Jeddah Corniche, Saudi Arabia on December 8, 2022.

Sports

Rich fans only: South Americans grumble over cost to watch football

'In my case it is impossible' to afford a ticket

BOGOTA: In football-mad South America, where love for the game transcends social class, watching stars like Lionel Messi play has become inaccessible to most as ticket prices hit the roof. During the September qualifying round for the 2026 World Cup, ardent fans across the continent grumbled over the cost of seeing their favorite team play.

"In my case it is impossible" to afford a ticket. "One can't enjoy it," said Pablo Gonzalez, 49, a maintenance worker at a university in the Colombian town of Barranquilla, where his country will play Uruguay on Thursday. The average ticket price for the match is \$102, in a country where the minimum monthly wage is \$270.

According to an AFP tally the tickets are the second highest in the region for the qualifiers. In Argentina, victors of the 2022 World Cup, fans hoping to see Messi in action were left disappointed after the football federation set ticket prices for Thursday's match against Paraguay at an average of \$120.

The country is battling annual inflation of 120 percent and poverty levels of 40 percent. Argentina's football federation has introduced a subscription program giving preferential access to match tickets. The "Gold" category costs \$14,000 for a three-year pass with a slew of benefits.

'Let people go for free'

Even Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni commented on how much it had cost him to buy tickets for his whole family. "It cost me a lot, like everyone

else. But who am I to set the price of tickets? If it was up to me, let people go for free," he told a press conference.

"What can I do? I can't do anything about it." Some prices are making "something popular like football exclusive," complained fan Candela Thompson to state news agency Telam. In Brazil, prices have shot up over the past month, with tickets going from an average of \$63 dollars to \$97 for Thursday's match against Venezuela in central Cuiaba.

Chilean captain Arturo Vidal, considered a footballer of the people due to his humble background, has also complained. "Tickets are expensive. I have already told the president (of the football association) to lower them a bit, we need a full stadium," Vidal said on social media before a match against Colombia in September.

According to the Chilean media, unlike in previous qualifiers, it took several days for tickets to sell out. In Uruguay, football authorities admitted they had erred after high prices left thousands of seats empty for a match against Chile in September.

"We made a mistake," said the country's football association president Ignacio Alonso in remarks to local media. "The proof is that the stadium should have sold 40,000 tickets, and only sold about 31,500." After the "rejection of the prices," he lowered ticket costs slightly. The cheapest spots for a match against Brazil on October 17 are now going for \$22 dollars, \$3 dollars less than the previous game. — AFP



GUAYAQUIL: In this file photo a fan of Ecuador holds a jersey of Argentina's Lionel Messi while waiting for the start of the South American qualification football match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. — AFP

International golf returns to China with LPGA Shanghai

SHANGHAI: International golf returns to China after a four-year pandemic hiatus when the LPGA Shanghai tees off on Thursday, with the host city hoping a hometown hero might be crowned champion.

China has thrown itself back into hosting major competitions since the abrupt end of its strict zero-Covid policy in December 2022 in an attempt to cement a reputation as a sporting superpower. International sports bodies have jumped at the chance to re-enter the world's second-largest economy.

"Having an event like this in a strategically important market for the LPGA is important not just from a commercial tournament standpoint, but also in terms of really growing the game," the LPGA's Sean Pyun told AFP.

"Having Shanghai, one of our key marquee events, back on our schedule makes us feel we're whole again." The \$2.1-million tournament had only been running for two years when the pandemic struck. It suffered the same fate as most other ma-

ajor sports events in China and was called off for the next three years.

The headliners for its return include current world number two and Shanghai native Yin Ruoning. Yin, 21, won the Women's PGA Championship in June, becoming only the second Chinese woman to win a major title after Feng Shanshan in 2012.

Competing against Yin will be Lilia Vu, the American who overtook her as number one last month. Vu's compatriot Danielle Kang, who won in Shanghai in 2018 and 2019, will defend her title. Yin was still a junior player and Vu wasn't able to qualify when Kang won four years ago.

Pandemic golf boom

The emergence of a potential Chinese champion is not the only thing that has changed since then, chairman of the China LPGA Tour (CLPGA) TK Pen told AFP. "Actually, the pandemic was good for golf (in China)," he said.

In contrast to restrictions on indoor activities, people were still allowed on courses outside peak Covid waves. "There's so many new players," Pen said. "We thought this year this was going to go down but it didn't."

Young people are taking up golf "super fast", with the number of young players registered with the China Golf Association jumping by 20,000 this

impressive run to the 2018 World Cup semi-finals, beating Brazil in the quarter-finals but bowing out to eventual champions France in the semi-final.

However, he was unable to rouse himself for last year's World Cup finals when along with fellow stars Kevin de Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku, Hazard and a below-par Belgium bowed out in the group stage. Nevertheless Hazard—who also won a Ligue 1 crown with Lille and two La Liga titles with Real and picked up a Champions League winners' medal as an unused substitute in 2022 -- was in grateful mood as he signed off.

"I was able to realise my dream, I have played and had fun on many pitches around the world," he said. "During my career I was lucky to meet great managers, coaches and teammates—thank you to everyone for these great times, I will miss you all." He thanked his clubs and the Belgian federation as well as friends, family and advisors "who have been close to me in good times and bad". "Finally, a huge thank you to you, my fans, who have followed me for all these years and for your encouragement everywhere I have played," he added. — AFP

year. The sport is now considered trendy, Pen said, with golf wear seen more on the streets and influencers flocking to courses. "We actually don't like it because they slow down the pace of play," Pen chuckled. "They're like, taking pictures all the time."

'Global powerhouse'

China still lags behind other countries when it comes to the professional sport, Pen said, particularly when it comes to the number of female players. "We obviously need new and more golfers, especially women golfers, (because they) retire so early and so frequently," Pen said, although he noted the latter was a worldwide phenomenon. Golf has a complicated history in China, where it was outlawed by the ruling Communist Party until the 1980s. The government banned new courses in 2004 and has since shut many others, causing a shortage that has hampered talent development, Pen said.

What it lacks in players, China makes up for in rankings. It has two players in the top 10 women in the world—Yin, and her friend and landlord Lin Xiyu. "I'm not sure China really understands at this moment how great the young talents that they're going to be producing for the next five to 10 years are," said the LPGA's Pyun. "I think China could really be a global powerhouse in women's golf, starting now." — AFP

Nigeria, South Africa could face Morocco in AFCON group

JOHANNESBURG: Nigeria, South Africa and Morocco could be placed in the same group when the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) draw is made in the Ivory Coast on Thursday. The six top seeds include Morocco, who created history at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar by becoming the first semi-finalists from Africa.

Nigeria are among the second seeds while South Africa have had to settle for a place among the third seeds for the draw in Abidjan, the Ivorian economic capital. Add surprise 2021 Cup of Nations quarter-finalists Gambia from the fourth seeds and it would be a striking "group of death", the term given to particularly tough sections.

Nigeria, three-time winners of the premier African football competition, and former champions South Africa were unlucky not to be seeded higher. The Super Eagles lie sixth in the continental rankings and, ordinarily, would have been a top seed, avoiding Morocco, title-holders Senegal, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt in the group stage.

But host countries not only automatically qualify for the two-yearly tournament, they are also always among the first seeds. To accommodate ninth-ranked Ivory Coast, sixth-placed Nigeria had to give way and now share second-seed status with Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Democratic Republic of Congo.

South Africa had been ranked above DR Congo for some time but, in the rankings that decided the seedings, they were placed one place below the Congolese. It was an ironic change of positions as South Africa defeated DR Congo in a friendly match just a couple of days before the rankings were released.

Shock champions

The other third seeds are Cape Verde, Guinea, Zambia, Equatorial Guinea and Mauritania while the fourth seeds include Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, Angola, Gambia and Tanzania. Shock 2012 champions thanks to a penalty shootout victory over Didier Drogba-inspired Ivory Coast, Zambia are back at the Cup of Nations after three straight failures to qualify.

Zambia and Mozambique, whose last appearance was in 2010, are the only qualifiers who have not featured in at least one of the last two tournaments. Despite a poor Cup of Nations record, Morocco are set to be installed as favourites to win the January 13-February 11 competition. They have been champions just once in 33 editions—topping a 1976 group in Ethiopia in one of only two editions where a mini-league determined the champions.

In the last Cup of Nations, hosted by Cameroon in 2022, Morocco were eliminated by Egypt in the quarter-finals. Morocco coach Walid Regragui, mastermind of the stunning World Cup campaign after taking charge just a few months earlier, says he will quit if his team fail to at least reach the semi-finals.

"We must be at least in the semi-finals of the CAN (Cup of Nations). If I do not go to the semi-finals, I will leave on my own," he told the Moroccan media. "I told my players that we cannot be kings of the world before being kings of our continent. Everyone wants to beat Morocco after our results in Qatar."

"This makes it more difficult for us to win, but it also motivates the players to improve and I welcome that." All six top seeds plus Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, DR Congo, South Africa and Zambia have won the Cup of Nations. The other champions—Ethiopia, Sudan and Congo Brazzaville—did not qualify. — AFP

Belgian football star Eden Hazard announces retirement

PARIS: Belgian attacking midfielder Eden Hazard announced his retirement on Tuesday after failing to find another club following his release by Real Madrid. The 32-year-old endured an injury-plagued spell at Real Madrid after his 89-million-pound (103 million euros, \$110 million) move from Chelsea in 2019, playing just 76 matches in all competitions across four seasons.

"You must listen to yourself and say stop at the right time," Hazard wrote on Instagram. "After 16 years and more than 700 matches played, I have decided to end my career as a professional footballer."

Hazard had a far happier time at Chelsea, winning both the Premier League title and Europa League twice as well as the FA and League Cup from 2012-2019. He was also integral to Belgium's

ble play after Michael Harris II pulled off a catch at the wall to get rid of Nick Castellanos.

The defeat was cruel on the Phillies who had built a 4-0 lead early on after an Alec Bohm single sent Trea Turner over home plate in the first inning before J.T. Realmuto's two-run homer made it 3-0 in the third inning.

Bryson Stott's sacrifice fly in the top of the fifth allowed Castellanos to make it 4-0 as the Phillies began to dream of taking a commanding 2-0 lead in the series. Phillies pitcher Wheeler, who finished with 10 strikeouts, had looked unstoppable through the opening five innings, but Atlanta finally got on the board with an Ozzie Albies single in the sixth inning that allowed Ronald Acuna Jr. to make it 4-1.

Travis d'Arnaud then made it a one-run game in the seventh, hammering a 414-foot homer to left field off Wheeler who was subsequently relieved by Jose Alvarado, who wrapped up the inning with the final two outs.

The Phillies looked on course to take their one-run lead into the ninth inning after Alvarado and Jeff Hoffman got the first two outs of the eighth inning. But as the tension mounted, Riley jumped on an 88mph slider off Hoffman to give Atlanta a decisive lead.



ATLANTA: Austin Riley #27 of the Atlanta Braves rounds the bases after hitting a two-run home run in the eighth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies during Game Two of the Division Series at Truist Park. — AFP

While the Braves are firmly back in contention in their series, the Los Angeles Dodgers slid closer to the exit after slumping to a 4-2 home defeat against the Arizona Diamondbacks. The Dodgers were left shellshocked after being pummeled 11-2 in game one on Saturday, and still appeared to be suffering a hangover as Arizona

jumped on pitcher Bobby Miller early to take a 3-0 first inning lead. The Dodgers struggled thereafter and although they clawed their way back to 4-2 late in the game, their offensive big guns failed to fire as Arizona held on to take a 2-0 series lead that left them one win away from advancing to the next round of the playoffs. — AFP



Eden Hazard

Riley blast sinks Phillies as Braves tie series

LOS ANGELES: Austin Riley blasted a two-run home run as the Atlanta Braves staged a late fightback to clinch a series-leveling victory over the Philadelphia Phillies on Monday while the Los Angeles Dodgers edged closer to an early postseason exit.

Riley's 376-foot homer in the bottom of the eighth inning set up a 5-4 win for the top-seeded Braves, who had been largely contained by Phillies starting pitcher Zack Wheeler through six innings at Truist Park. "I was just trying to put a barrel on the ball, that's all it was," Riley said afterwards. "It's definitely up there with my top ones... obviously still a lot of work to do. Just going to enjoy this one tonight."

The win squared the best-of-five National League Division Series at 1-1 as the teams head to Philadelphia for game three on Wednesday. As well as scoring the go-ahead home run, Riley sealed the Braves win with a dazzling bullet throw to first baseman Matt Olson to get Bryce Harper out on a dou-

UK, Ireland to host Euro 2028

Turkey cheers receiving Euro 2032 co-hosting rights with Italy



UEFA EURO 2028 and 2032 Hosts Announcement

NYON: Welsh retired professional footballer, heading the delegation of UK and Ireland Gareth Bale (C), flanked by UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin (4th L), poses with fans after United Kingdom and Ireland were elected to host the Euro 2028 football tournament during a ceremony at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon on October 10, 2023. — AFP

NYON: The United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland will co-host Euro 2028, while Italy and Turkey will be joint hosts of the 2032 tournament, UEFA announced on Tuesday. Both bids ran unopposed but still needed official approval from European football's governing body, which they received at a meeting in Switzerland.

Turkey said Tuesday it cherished the chance to co-host the Euro 2032 tournament with what it called "friendly country" Italy. "The heart of football will beat in Turkey in 2032!" Turkish Sports Minister Osman Askin Bak declared on social media moments after UEFA announced the 2028 and 2032 hosting rights.

"We are happy to host #EURO2032 with the friendly country Italy. It is an honor to be rewarded for the steps we have taken in the 100th anniversary of our beautiful country, which we have woven together with investments into sport."

Turkey last week withdrew from the bidding process for Euro 2028, clearing the path for Britain and Ireland, who shelved plans to bid to host the 2030 World Cup to focus on staging the European Championship. "The UK and Ireland thanks UEFA for its confidence to award UEFA EURO

2028 to the five Association partnership, and congratulates Italy and Turkey on their appointment for UEFA EURO 2032," read a joint statement from the five football associations.

FIFA last week announced that Morocco, Portugal and Spain will stage the 2030 World Cup but games will also be played in Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay as the footballing showpiece celebrates its centenary. Saudi Arabia subsequently revealed it plans to bid to host the 2034 World Cup.

Finally for Turkey

Turkey, which has bid unsuccessfully to stage every European Championship going back to 2008, was initially a candidate for both Euro 2028 and 2032. However, in July it agreed to join Italy in a bid for the 2032 edition, without saying at the time if it would pull out of the running for 2028.

England, which hosted the women's Euro last year, last organized a major men's tournament in 1996, when the European Championship involved just 16 teams. It also hosted the final of the 24-team Euro 2020, delayed by a year due to the pandemic and held in venues across Europe, at Wembley.

Between them, England and Scotland hosted 12

games during that tournament. Six of the proposed venues for the 2028 tournament are in England, with two stadiums in London and others in Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Birmingham. Belfast, Dublin, Glasgow and Cardiff are also in line for matches.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said on X, formerly Twitter, that he was "over the moon that Ireland and the UK will co-host Euro 2028". "It will be the biggest event ever hosted by our two islands working together." Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill told BBC Sport it was great to be "part of something special" and that the country has the capacity to put on "a fantastic tournament".

Italy to combine with Turkey

Italy hosted matches in Rome at Euro 2020 but has not hosted a tournament on its own since the 1990 World Cup. It hosted the final stages of the four-team Euro in 1968 and the eight-team tournament in 1980.

Turkey, which hosted this year's Champions League final in Istanbul in June, has never been awarded a major international competition. But after four failed attempts, and having joined forces with Italy, the lack of any rival contend-

ers means Turkey will now get its chance. That is despite human rights concerns still lingering following Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's re-election in May—he has not shown any clemency towards, or announced an amnesty for, tens of thousands of political opponents who have been imprisoned.

"The heart of football will beat in Turkey in 2032!" said Turkish Sports Minister Osman Askin Bak on social media in response to the UEFA announcement. "We are happy to host #EURO2032 with the friendly country Italy. It is an honor to be rewarded for the steps we have taken in the 100th anniversary of our beautiful country, which we have woven together with investments into sport."

The Turkish Football Federation promised to offer spectators "the ultimate European Championship experience". Russia initially declared an interest in hosting either the 2028 or 2032 Euro but UEFA later said it would not consider any bid from the Russian Football Union.

That was after Russian clubs and national teams were suspended from all UEFA competitions due to the war in Ukraine. The next Euro will be played in Germany next year, from June 14 to July 14. — AFP

Roaring Shelton fights back to reach Shanghai last eight

SHANGHAI: US Open semi-finalist Ben Shelton fought back from a set down to defeat Jannik Sinner on Tuesday and reach the Shanghai Masters last eight in one of the biggest victories of his young career. The 19th seed emerged from an excruciatingly tight deciding set to battle through 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) and will face fellow American Sebastian Korda in the quarter-finals.

Shelton, who lost to Novak Djokovic in the last four in New York last month, did his now-trademark "dialled-in" celebration to mark his first time into the quarter-finals of a Masters. The 26th-seeded Korda fended off a late fightback from the 20th seed Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina to go through 7-5, 7-6 (8/6).

Shelton, who turned 21 on Monday, endured a torrid opening set against the in-form sixth seed Sinner, summed up by his double fault to concede the seventh game of an error-strewn first stanza. The Italian Sinner, fresh from winning the China Open in Beijing, clinched the opening set with a well-placed smash.

The athletic Shelton was a changed man in the second, sealing the set with an ace and a roar, and then immediately put Sinner under the cosh to start the decider. The 22-year-old Sinner survived the initial onslaught, saving five break points to seal a game that lasted nearly 10 minutes, and the set went with serve to force a tiebreak.

But it was Shelton who prevailed—and a crowd that had been on his side serenaded him by singing happy birthday. A tournament full of shocks had another to start the day when 91st-ranked Fabian Marozsan had a belated birthday present of his own by beating eighth-seeded Casper Ruud. The unseeded



SHANGHAI: US's Ben Shelton hits a return to Italy's Jannik Sinner in their men's singles match during the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament in Shanghai on October 10, 2023. — AFP

Hungarian won 7-6 (7/3), 3-6, 6-4 and will face Poland's 16th-seeded Hubert Hurkacz or home player Zhang Zhizhen in the last eight. Marozsan sealed the deal in two hours and 38 minutes with a stinging forehand down the line on his second match point and called his maiden Masters quarter-final the perfect present, having turned 24 on Sunday.

"This is just only my second Masters tournament, so it's kind of a new tournament series for me," said the Hungarian, who beat Carlos Alcaraz at the Italian Open in May. "I'm really enjoying this, I'm very proud for this one," added Marozsan, who is playing in Asia for the first time.

The Shanghai event, which is back on the ATP calendar for the first time since the Covid pandemic, has witnessed several shocks. Korda dumped out second-seeded Daniil Medvedev on Sunday and the next day Stefanos Tsitsipas, the fourth seed from Greece, lost to France's 32nd seed Ugo Humbert in a three-set battle stretching beyond midnight. The upsets have paved the way for top seed Alcaraz, who faces 18th seed Grigor Dimitrov in the last 16 on Wednesday. World number Djokovic is out in China. — AFP

Wales comfortable with either tag, says Thomas

TOULON: Wales, unbeaten in pool play, were hailed by self-proclaimed underdogs Argentina as favourites for Saturday's World Cup quarter-final, but assistant coach Jonathan Thomas insisted the Welsh were unbothered by either tag.

Los Pumas, who had lost their opener to England, ensured a last-eight meeting with Wales in Marseille on Saturday after beating Japan 39-27 in their final group game. "We know we'll be well and truly underdogs," Argentina coach Michael Cheika said of the prospect of facing a rejuvenated Wales team.

Breakdown coach Thomas, who won 67 caps and featured at the 2003 and 2007 World Cups as a flanker, said head coach Warren Gatland—in his second tenure having left in 2019 after 12 successful years at the helm—had changed the Welsh mindset when it came to tags.

"When I was a young player with Wales, we always loved that underdog sort of feeling," he said. "When 'Gats' came in 2008, with the evolution of the team, he changed that mindset so whether we're underdogs or favourites, it does not faze us too much whereas maybe in years gone by that was the case."

Thomas added: "We're comfortable whether we're favourites or underdogs, it doesn't bother us. 'The whole thing is a process, we need to stick to what we do well and you've got to take the emotion of being favourites or underdogs out of that."

"It's the same as the scoreboard in the game, you take the emotion out of that, stick to being in the present moment, focusing on what your job is and delivering under pressure. 'You've got to be excited about that pressure at



NANTES: Wales' wing Louis Rees-Zammit (C) leaps to catch a high ball during the France 2023 Rugby World Cup Pool C match between Wales and Georgia at the Stade de la Beaujoire in Nantes, western France. — AFP

this stage of a World Cup." "CKnock out rugby, he said was "why we're here, it's what we've been building for for 3-4 months. It's been a long time". "The whole point of sport is what's your why and what's your goal and for us as a collective our goal from day one has been to get to finals rugby, knock-out rugby.

"We've achieved that but we're not satisfied with just getting to the quarter-finals, clearly we want to win the game." Respect for Argentina would be granted, of course, the former flanker added, warning of the quality of all teams in the last-eight.

Comparing an opening win in the Six Nations to getting out of the pool in the World Cup, Thomas said both scenarios gave you a massive confidence boost. "When you get to this stage, any team on their day can beat anyone, they can raise their game... every team will feel like they have some momentum on their side," he said.

"Quality players, quality teams in the last eight, so it's exciting, we need to focus on ourselves and show the best version of ourselves and if we do that we've got a very good chance." Turning to injuries to Gareth Anscombe (groin) and full-back Liam Williams (knee), Thomas said that "at this stage, it's looking positive... but we'll see". — AFP