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Law college students protest closure of male-female classes

Students society to file court case to halt closure



KUWAIT: Students arrive to attend classes at Kuwait University in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A number of students at the college of law, Kuwait University, staged a protest on Thursday outside the university administration in protest against a decision to close mixed education classes in implementation of a 1996 law to impose gender segregation at Kuwait University. The Law College Students' Society said it will file an urgent case before the administrative court to stop the closure, saying the decision was unnecessary and will disrupt study at those classes.

The decision was taken earlier this week by new Education and Higher Education Minister Adel Al-Mane, appointed just last week, and acting Kuwait University Director Fayez Al-Dhafiri, and implemented on Wednesday, just three days before the start of the new educational year at the college of law. Dhafiri said that the decision came in implementation of the 1996 law that banned mixed education at Kuwait University, despite a ruling by the Constitutional Court in 2015 allowing mixed education only when it was necessary and under exceptional cases.

Islamist MP Mohammad Hayef, who heads a parliamentary committee for virtue and Islamic principles, said on Wednesday that the committee agreed with the higher education minister and the Kuwait University Director to apply the 1996 law banning mixed education. Students were furious at the deci-



sion because it came at the last moment when they had almost completed the registration of subjects for the upcoming semester, opening on Sunday.

Abdullah Al-Kundari, representative of the college of law students, told reporters that the decision was taken only on Wednesday, just three days before the start of the new academic year. He said this will completely disrupt the registration of subjects for the next semester and the college administration will not succeed in re-registering subjects of some 3,500 students. This is impossible, he said.

Member of the students society, Sager Mohammad, said the decision is ill-advised for this year and maybe it could be implemented next year. Former MP Hisham Al-Saleh blasted the minister of higher education, claiming he took the decision in order to protect his post, adding that the constitutional court ruling has allowed mixed-education under emergency circumstances.

CSC approves flexible hours system to fight traffic jams



KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission approved an interior ministry recommendation to allow flexible hours for public sector employees in an attempt to reduce traffic jams in Kuwait. According to the new system, public sector employees are free to arrive at work between 7:00 am and 9:00 am, and leave between 1:30 pm and 3:30 pm as long as they complete seven hours. The CSC gave state departments the choice to adopt the new flexible hour system or keep the current system based on the nature of their work.

US boosts Bahrain relations with new security agreement

WASHINGTON: The United States has signed an agreement with Bahrain to enhance defense and economic ties, a show of support for the Gulf monarchy that a decade ago faced an arms embargo. Bahrain - which has tense relations with nearby Iran - is already home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, but the agreement will solidify the relationship both symbolically and by boosting cooperation, including through a commitment to share intelligence.

The agreement will allow "us to even better

determine or respond to threats as they arise," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said before a signing ceremony with Bahrain's crown prince, Prime Minister Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. "The heart of the agreement is a shared goal - working together to build a region that is more secure, more prosperous and that's more connected to the world," Blinken said.

Dubbed the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement, the deal will also promote scientific exchanges, investment opportunities and work on renewable energy. In what Blinken billed as a first-of-a-kind measure, the agreement will commit the two countries to work together on "trusted technologies" - an allusion to avoiding providers, often from China, seen by the United States as potentially unsafe.

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WASHINGTON: Bahrain's Prime Minister and Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sign a security integration and prosperity agreement at the US Department of State in Washington, DC. — AFP

Drought, heat, fires threaten Lebanon's northern forests

KOBAYAT: Heatwaves, low rainfall and the threat of wildfires are compounding the woes of people in the forested north of Lebanon, a country where economic pain has long taken prominence over environmental concerns. After a blistering and dry summer, residents of the mountainous Akkar region near the Syrian border are voicing fears about climate change and water scarcity.

Farmer Abdullah Hammud, 60, has spent his life in the green hills of Akkar, growing everything from tomatoes to figs, but says environmental problems are now hurting his livelihood. "I've never seen it this hot," Hammud said, looking at a field where he was planning to grow cabbage. "We lost part of the crops." With Lebanon's mains water supply unreliable at best, he depends on a nearby spring for irrigation, but worries that the supply is falling.

Because trucking in water for his house and farm is not an option, he said, "if the water ran out, we would have to leave". Rainfall has been below average this year in Lebanon, Mohamad Kanj from the meteorological department told AFP. A 13-day heatwave last month was "the most severe recorded in



KOBAYAT: A hillside burnt during a forest fire is pictured near the town of Kobayat, in Lebanon's northern Akkar region. — AFP

terms of the number of days, the area affected and the exceptional temperatures".

Akkar was already one of Lebanon's most disadvantaged regions before the national economy imploded in late 2019, plunging much of the population into poverty. A report from the American University of Beirut last year found the region also has only low-to-moderate resilience to climate change. Devastating forest fires raged two years ago near the town of Kobayat, where houses are nestled among the trees in surrounding hills. A 15-year-old died while helping to battle the flames.

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Saudi, Russian oil cuts 'will cause big supply shortfall'

PARIS: Oil cuts by Saudi Arabia and Russia will cause a "significant" global supply shortfall through the end of the year, raising the risk of further market volatility, the International Energy Agency said. The warning in the IEA's monthly market report comes a day after oil prices jumped following OPEC's own update showed that the gap between global supply and demand would be the widest since 2007. "The Saudi-Russian alliance is proving a formidable challenge for oil markets," the IEA said. Oil prices had been slumping in recent months after surging following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.

In an effort to prop up prices, Saudi Arabia and Russia, its ally in the wider OPEC+ group, announced earlier this month that they would extend voluntary cuts until the end of the year. "From September onwards, the loss of OPEC+ production, led by Saudi Arabia, will drive a significant supply shortfall through the fourth

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Local

Health minister says clots dropped during COVID-19

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi said on Thursday that the number of recorded clots in Kuwait has dropped significantly after the vaccination drive against the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a reply to a question by MP Muhallaf Al-Mudhaf, the minister said that as many as 12,475 clots were recorded in Kuwait in 2021 compared to 15,000 strokes in 2019, the year before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that required a world-wide vaccination drive.

Awadhi said that during the anti-COVID vaccination drive, Kuwait used 3.6 million of Pfizer and 2.8 million of Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccines. Reports have claimed that the use of COVID-19 vaccines accelerated the number of clots in the country.



Ahmad Al-Awadhi

adding that it was found that the number of blood coagulation cases after the vaccination was lower than those before the COVID-19.

The minister also added that in 2020, a total of 10,870 clots took place, a sharp decline from the annual average before the pandemic. He added that in 2018 and 2017, a total of 15,340 and 15,265 clots, respectively, took place. The minister also said that strokes that happened after receiving the vaccination are part of the rare side effects,



KUWAIT: Participants of the seminar pose for a group photo. — KUNA

Kuwait's offshore exploration enters new era: Official

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil (MoO) confirmed that the offshore exploration drilling project enters a new and promising era of oil and gas exploration operations in the country, contributing to achieving the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's 2040 strategy and increasing its production capacity. The Director of Public Relations and Media at the Ministry Sheikha Tamader Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said during a discussion panel organized by the ministry on Wednesday entitled "Offshore Drilling Project," that the project currently being implemented by Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) will broaden horizons for a future that the country looks forward to for further development.

She pointed out KOC's keenness to ensure that the offshore drilling experience is complete, integrated and safe in all its aspects, underscoring the aim of achieving the maximum benefit. On his side, Senior Geophysicist at KOC Maitham Ebrahim underlined the importance of the marine exploration project as a national project whose purpose is to contribute to increasing Kuwait's reserves of hydrocarbon resources. The project ensures the continuity of new hydrocarbon resources to meet the needs of the global market and enhances Kuwait's role as one of the reliable producers in the world, Ebrahim said. The project includes Kuwait among the leading regional players as a prominent marine operator in

accordance with international standards and ensures the addition of new technical specializations connected to offshore drilling operations and the creation of new and diverse job opportunities, he added.

Meanwhile, Senior Geologist at KOC Ahmad Al-Otaibi said that the stages of the current marine exploration project focused on implementing a two-dimensional seismic survey, studying the areas surrounding the marine area, conducting geophysical and geological studies to know the details of the earth's layers and their compositions, identifying the best marine drilling sites, and preparing for logistical operations.

The marine area represents approximately one-third of Kuwait's total land area, and the program includes drilling six exploratory wells to explore for oil and gas in the marine areas of Kuwait as a first stage, and based on the drilling results, the subsequent stages will be determined successively, Al-Otaibi stated.

During the marine exploratory project, two jack-up rigs were used, and a marine risk assessment was carried out and all obstacles were removed to ensure that the drilling platforms reached the drilling sites and settled safely. Drilling of the first exploratory well began using the Oriental Phoenix rig. The Oriental Dragon drilling rig is expected to begin drilling the second exploratory well soon, he mentioned. He pointed out the use of the latest methods and means during drilling operations, which protect the surrounding marine area from pollution. The workers also undergo special training for this purpose, he added, indicating that if any accident occurs, it will be dealt with within the emergency response plan prepared in advance for all possible scenarios. — KUNA

the case with the university building, the airport and even the Derwazat Abd Al-Razzaq project, or simply repairing the streets.

The second parameter, which is more dangerous, is that the government has known about the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh issue and its problems for a long time when its problems were small. The absence of proactive thinking and dealing with those problems in Kuwait gradually exacerbated them until they became difficult to solve. If it were the only problem, it would be easy to solve, but these are problems that start small but are neglected so that they grow. The list of such problems is too long; therefore, it is enough to cite examples such as the horizontal housing expansion whose continuation is impossible. Other examples include the following: demographic structure, especially gender, the lagging of education for many years, the citizen labor market, with its disguised unemployment that exceeds half of its numbers, the probable inability of the Public Institution for Social Security to meet retirees' future entitlements, and tolerance with forgery of nationality



A crowded street in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

Kuwait 'can benefit from Saudi-Iran reconciliation'

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: In the last few months, the region has witnessed a progressive step through the Saudi-Iranian reconciliation. This will surely lead the region into a new era of bilateral relations, particularly in economic and trade relations among the GCC countries. While Kuwait is considered one of the key pillars of the economy in the GCC, the effect of this reconciliation is expected to be quite promising. The Kuwait Times spoke with business experts and discussed with them the possible positive impact on Kuwait's economy following the reconciliation and what their expectations are for the country.

Consultant and oil expert Abdulsamee Bahbahani said that in view of the major transformation that is taking place in Saudi Arabia, the kingdom is keen on establishing more business relations with other countries in the region. It does not seek to limit its relations to geopolitical factors, as the country is witnessing a qualitative leap in economic development and has directed its investments so as to create big and profitable projects.

"This trend was greatly reflected in the oil sector. These positive changes in Saudi Arabia have reflected on OPEC with a significant impact since Prince Mohammad bin Salman led the OPEC conference ten years ago," he noted. Regarding the reconciliation, the oil expert said that there are almost four main oil fields shared between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Kuwait is also a part of some of the oil fields. These are some of the most important benefits that Kuwait gets from the reconciliation since these oil fields were vulnerable to destruction.

"If there were no economic agreements based on the union of production, there is no doubt that this is vulnerable," he said. The expert pointed out that Iranian oil production has

recently reached 3.5 million barrels per day as a result of the economic union realized with other countries. The country is on track to produce 4 million barrels per day by the end of 2024, despite the international sanctions. He said the reconciliation will be to the advantage of all countries in the region, including Kuwait. He said Saudi Arabia will soon join the BRICS bloc, which represents a combined global GDP of 22 percent and will become a major competitor of the G7.

According to him, the reconciliation presents a great opportunity for Kuwait to increase its economic investments and participate in oil export operations with Iran. He expected that there will be a regional alliance in petrochemical export operations, especially since Iran is the second country in the world in terms of gas reserves, in addition to the early existence of shared Saudi-Iranian oil and petrochemical projects, which will develop into great success.

Economic expert Mohammad Ramadan stressed that Kuwait is one of the major beneficiaries of the reconciliation as it enjoys good relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. He said that this reconciliation will positively impact Kuwait. He pointed out that with the existence of major Chinese projects like the Silk Road, Kuwait has lost several economic opportunities prior to the reconciliation, especially since Kuwait has a good relationship with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although there is a great opportunity for Kuwait to benefit from the reconciliation, the country has not taken action towards it. "Despite the current political stability in the region, Kuwait considers that economic development is not one of its priorities and does not attach importance to it. We lack economic development plans, and as such, we will not achieve development unless there is a real desire from the authorities," he concluded.



Mohammad Ramadan

Speaker hosts delegation from Martyrs Society



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun on Thursday received a delegation of the society of the families of the martyrs, prisoners and the missing. The delegation included the society

Chairman Fayeز Al-Enezi, its board members Badr Al-Sewagh and Nawaf Al-Huwaider. Speaker Al-Saadoun also received the Czech Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Jaroslav Siro on Thursday. — KUNA

AL-SHALL WEEKLY REPORT

Short-term solution not an answer to Jleeb problems

KUWAIT: The Minister of State for Municipal Affairs stated that the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh has become a difficult-to-treat case, and the choice of the committee formed to study its conditions is a radical solution, or a proposal to expropriate its remaining part at an approximate cost of KD 1.432 billion.

The population of that area is nearly 274,025 according to the latest report of the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). The population of Kuwait reached 4.824 million people at the end of June 2023 according to the same source. This means that an area of only 8,281 square kilometers, or about 1 percent of the inhabited area of the country, which is about 15 percent of its total area, is inhabited by 5.7 percent of Kuwait's population. In other words, one out of every 17.5 persons in Kuwait lives in that very small area.

Dealing with this issue comprises two parameters. The first is jumping to easy solutions or the financial treatment. The danger of this lies in resorting to burying the visible part of the problem in the short term, instead of confronting the serious violations. The expropriation cost is about KD 1.432 billion which is preferred without any approach at the state level for its alternative uses. Nor does it consider the additional huge sums of money required to complete the project after expropriation. Nor does it consider the doors it could open to demand the same. We do not believe that there is a prior plan to deal with the re-absorption of about 5.7 percent of Kuwait's population once that area is evacuated apart from the talk about a labor city project that may take a long time to complete, or

and higher education certificates. The latest of these is the exceptional salaries scandal.

All of the above problems and many more require a comparison between them regarding their priority and solutions and the decision to expropriate Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. All of them need a proactive confrontation so as not to become incurable ruin for Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. All of them are on the way to ruin if the government continues to postpone confronting them. They also include the impossibility of sustaining public finance and the sustainability of the economy. When a country announces a vision or a government announces a program, all relevant issues must be on the table with a differentiation that determines priorities according to importance and the abundance of available financial and human resources to confront them.

Unfortunately, in Kuwait, visions and programs are beautiful on paper, but the reality is that every ministry, or even a committee, is capable of taking the country toward its priority, even if it contradicts the contents of the vision papers and programs.



MUSCAT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban with his British counterpart Nigel Huddleston. — KUNA

Al-Aiban holds talks with UK counterpart

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Aiban explored on Thursday with his British counterpart Nigel Huddleston the free trade agreement (FTA) between the UK and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

In a press release, the ministry said that he came during the 65th meeting of the GCC Trade Cooperation Committee in Oman, which discussed multiple topics and praised the UK-GCC negotiators regarding the agreement. The UK and GCC are in their fourth round of negotiations for a free trade agreement, the press release said, adding that the fifth round is expected to be hosted by the GCC later this year. The Minister of Commerce and Industry participated in the 65th meeting of the GCC Trade Cooperation Committee, held in Oman, that aims to boost economy and trade among the GCC member states—Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. — KUNA

Local

Japan seeks to bolster cooperation with Kuwaiti Armed Forces: Envoy

Japan Embassy hosts reception to mark 'Self Defense Forces Day'



Fahad Al-Otaibi and Morino Yasunari cutting the cake during the event.



A group picture of guests during the reception on the Japan Self Defense Forces Day.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Japan hosted a reception on Wednesday on the occasion of Japan's Self Defense Forces Day at the residence of Morino Yasunari, the Ambassador of Japan to the State of Kuwait. A large number of resident ambassadors and diplomats attended the event.

Yasunari, in his opening remarks, expressed happiness to commemorate the establishment of Japan Self Defense Forces with the representatives of Ministry of Defense of Kuwait, other ministries of Kuwait, and many friends from the Diplomatic Corp and other offices. He also thanked his guests for joining him on the event.

He said Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF), with its 69-year history, is becoming more active and conducting diverse activities to contribute to the world peace. "Especially in the Indo-Pacific region, JSDF is strengthening its cooperation with their ally, the US and other partners to protect the security of Japan and maintain peace and stability in the region," he said. In addition, Japan has for-



Brigadier Fahad Al-Otaibi

mulated last December a new National Security Strategy as well as National Defense Strategy and is now pursuing fundamental reinforcement of its defense capabilities. Moreover, in the Middle East, JSDF is conducting anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and dispatching its personnel alongside Multilateral Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula. Additionally, he said that Kuwait, as an essential player for stability in the Middle East, is Japan's close partner in the area of peace and security.

Japan is proud that JSDF has carried out humanitarian and reconstruction assistance activities in Iraq from 2004-08 with major support

from Kuwait and expressed his hopes to further develop the cooperation with Kuwaiti Armed Forces through various exchanges, especially for education and training of personnel, he said.

Yasunari also said that unfortunately, peace and security has constantly been disturbed or threatened in the world, including in the Middle East, and emphasized on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, describing it as a clear violation of the international law by a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Japan is strongly opposed to such a unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force. Yoshimasa Hayashi, the former Foreign Minister of Japan, during his meeting with the Arab League nations, called for unity and underlined the need to uphold the free and open international order based on the rule of law. He concluded his speech by expressing his hopes that Japan and Kuwait will further enjoy their historical friendship and bolster cooperation for world peace and prosperity. He also introduced Japan's new Defense Attache, Col Ryo Tatsukawa on the occasion.



KUWAIT: (From left to right), Japanese Ambassador Morino Yasunari, Brigadier Fahad Al-Otaibi and Colonel Ryo Tatsukawa.



KUWAIT: The second relief plane from the Kuwaiti air bridge at Abdulla Al-Mubarak Air Base on Thursday to help hurricane victims in Libya. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's second relief plane to Libya takes off

KUWAIT: The second relief plane from the Kuwaiti air bridge left Kuwait Abdulla Al-Mubarak Air Base on Thursday to help hurricane victims in Libya, loaded with 41 tons of humanitarian relief supplies. Al-Salam Society for Humanitarian and Charitable Works carried out the process in cooperation with the International Islamic Charitable Organization and in coordination and supervision of the Ministries of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Defense.

In a statement to KUNA, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Libya Ziad Faisal Al-Mashaan said that the launch of the second Kuwaiti air bridge flight to provide urgent help to the Libyan people comes in the context continuing to implement the high instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It also came under the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister, and the close follow-up of the Libyan Foreign Minister to support Libyan efforts to confront this unprecedented humanitarian disaster.

Ambassador Al-Mashaan stressed that the Kuwaiti charitable societies represents one of the reliable humanitarian institutions to help reach afflicted people worldwide. In a similar statement, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Salam Society for Humanitarian and Charitable Works Dr Nabil Al-Aoun confirmed the full and

urgent response to relief those affected by the hurricane in Libya, in coordination with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He added that Al-Salam Charity is preparing for another flight in approximately three days for the same purpose, with relief materials including food, medical and electrical equipment, blankets, and others. He expressed his thanks to the high Kuwaiti Leadership in facilitating this mission. On his part, Public Relations Officer at the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) Saud Al-Kandari, told KUNA that the political leadership's support for humanitarian efforts aimed at relieving those affected by the hurricane enabled us to deliver aid, in cooperation with Al-Salam Charity. Al-Kandari stressed that the impact of this natural disaster on the Libyan people obliges us to extend our help and urgent assistance. — KUNA

Kuwaitis turn tangling beads into art form

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis have mastered the craft of tangling beads as an art form passed down through generations, an often strenuous effort that requires both time and patience.

Presenting a workshop on the intricacies of this activity, Yousef Al-Qallaf, a practitioner of this art form that is deeply embedded in Kuwaiti tradition, displayed the vast array of beads that are used in this local pastime. — KUNA



The workshop on tangling beads. — KUNA



PAS, CAN teams discuss health awareness plans

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sport (PAS) Director General Yousuf Abdullah Al-Baidan received a delegation from the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) that consisted of members from the Board and Executive Committee Dr Hussa Majid Al-Shaheen, Director of Haido Academy, the sports arm of CAN Abdullah Al-Saleh.

The two sides discussed means of joint cooperation in the field of sports in order to increase health awareness and to draw attention to the importance of medical activity. Al-Baidan on his part lauded the campaign's activities and its awareness role that focus on



Yousuf Abdullah Al-Baidan, Dr Hussa Majid Al-Shaheen and Abdullah Al-Saleh.

reducing cancer rates in Kuwait especially that rates of recovery increase with early detection.

He said PAS will support the campaign in many ways in the field of sport to achieve its goals due to the necessity of all government entities and private organizations to work together in support of such activities due to its effective role in raising the rate of health awareness.

Dr Hussa Al-Shaheen appreciated the meeting as it resulted in many positive issues, most importantly carrying out CAN's year-long sport activities in cooperation with the PAS, adding that CAN strategy relies on several aspects: awareness, nutrition and activity, in addition to encouraging the society to follow a healthy lifestyle.

Abdullah Al-Saleh thanked Yousuf Al-Baidan for PAS' patronage of the Kuwait amateurs Football League, for patronizing CAN since 2017. The academy's sport activities enjoyed large turnout, as it carried out the physical fitness course lately with 46 participants and achieved considerable results.

Al-Saleh said the campaign brought in a nutritionist for participants to give them a diet plan that agrees with their weight and had a coach to train them on the best exercises that helped them reach the best weight during the course.

Arab driver in net for helping domestic helpers run away

KUWAIT: Residency detectives arrested an Egyptian taxi driver following a week of diligent investigations who used to assist domestic helpers to escape from their employers and have them work on hourly basis in exchange of money.

Detectives received several complaints from citizens about helpers escaping from their homes. A task

force was formed and kept the areas under surveillance. The driver was arrested while helping a worker escape from Abu Fateera area house. The suspect told detectives that he was carrying out his criminal activity for a while and informed detectives about a flat in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in which he houses the escaped helpers. Three domestic laborers were found in the flat.

In a separate case, residency detectives arrested an Asian woman for running a domestic help office in Farwaniya governorate where she was employing helpers who escaped from their employers. Seven women were found there.

Meanwhile, a lady lost her life during a traffic accident on the Fifth Ring Road as Sulaibikhat fire center responded, dealt with the accident and handed the case to concerned authorities.



A view of the accident site on the Fifth Ring Road.

News in Brief

Hot weather to persist in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Weekend weather in Kuwait will be very hot in midday and hot at night, said the meteorological department on Thursday. The department director, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, said in remarks to KUNA that Kuwait would remain gripped with the seasonal Indian low depression, coupled with unsteady hot winds that would cause dust waves particularly in undeveloped areas. The temperature on Thursday hit 48 degrees and fell to 32 degrees at night. On Friday, the highest heat level is expected at 46 degrees during day time and 29-32 degrees at night. On Saturday, Al-Qarawi said the temperature would soar to 46 degrees maximum and drop to the 32-29 degrees at night. — KUNA

Four shops closed

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry closed down four shops in Salmiya for selling counterfeit goods. A quantity of bags, clothes, shoes and accessories were found carrying counterfeit labels of major trademarks. The violations were found following procedures by the commercial supervision emergency team, and legal action against the violators to follow.

Kuwait crude gains \$1.53pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil rose \$1.53 during Wednesday's trading to reach \$96.71 per barrel compared with \$95.18 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent futures however edged 18 cents lower to \$91.88 pb and West Texas Intermediate dropped 32 cents to \$88.52 pb. — KUNA

US dollar remains stable

KUWAIT: The US dollar remained stable on Thursday vis-a-vis the Kuwaiti dinar trading at KD 0.308. The euro also steadied exchanging at KD 0.331 compared to Wednesday's exchange rates. The Central Bank of Kuwait said in its daily bulletin that the pound sterling also remained stable at KD 0.385, while the Swiss franc stood at KD 0.345, and the Japanese yen remained stable at KD 0.002. Exchange rates declared by the CBK reflect average prices and not rates of actual transactions. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: As the summer gradually withers in Kuwait, the season for the date harvesting in the country also comes to an end. Dates come in different varieties including, Ajwa, Birhi, Ikhlass, Khudary, Makboosh and Sukari. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

LAPA, theater trainers, activists hold workshop on scenography

Workshop sheds light on set design, lighting and special effects



Scenography workshop in progress.



Honoring the students of the scenography workshop after the end of the workshop.



KUWAIT: Scenographer and visual artist Khalifa Al-Hajri explains how to design written theatrical scripts and transform them into three-dimensional and tangible theatrical scenes.



Part of the scenography workshop within the activities of the fifth theatrical season.



Snapshots from the scenography workshop.



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KUWAIT: As part of the fifth theatrical sanctuary program, a collaborative effort between the LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) and renowned theater trainers, enthusiasts and academics from Kuwait, the Arab world and beyond, the academy successfully concluded an exclusive training workshop on scenography design. This marked the third installment of its kind, led by scenographer and visual artist Dr Khalifa Al-Hajri. The workshop catered to a diverse group of individuals passionate about scenography, including both amateurs and professionals.

Dr Hajri, an esteemed member of the International Organization of Scenographers, Theater Architects and Technicians and a faculty member at the Higher Institute of Performing Arts in Kuwait, dedicated himself to providing professional training to the participants. Under his guidance, attendees had the opportunity to learn the intricate process of transforming written theatrical scripts into three-dimensional, tangible theatrical landscapes. They also delved into the art of crafting the complete theatrical scene, encompassing elements such as set design, lighting, special effects and the harmonious integration of all components to create a compelling stage presentation.

This workshop is part of the activities of the scenography laboratory to be followed this month by the workshop on the art of theatrical costumes featuring renowned international costume designer Gianluca Sabica,

known for his work on numerous international productions.

Dr Hajri expressed his appreciation for LAPA's efforts in promoting the significance of theater, music and the arts. He emphasized the vital role of scenography in shaping theatrical spaces, stressing the importance of mastering its intricacies and gaining a deeper understanding of its core concepts. Dr Hajri highlighted that scenography combines science, art and aesthetic sensibility, requiring technical expertise, artistic prowess and knowledge of various crafts such as carpentry, sewing, makeup, engineering, lighting and sound effects control.

Additionally, it necessitates a profound understanding of disciplines such as sculpture, architecture, graphics and engraving. Ultimately, scenography is an art that demands a keen aesthetic sense in stage decoration and a creative spirit to interpret and reimagine dramatic texts.

Participants were effusive in their praise for the workshop. Munira Al-Omairi, a repeat attendee, expressed her gratitude for Dr Hajri's valuable insights, which enriched her knowledge and understanding of the theatrical field. She noted that the workshop allowed her to delve into aspects of theatrical lighting, perspective and set size calculations, while also exploring the audience's perspective on the final design.

Ghadeer Al-Abkal shared her experience in applying a theatrical scene practically, highlighting the valuable lessons learned in integrating with the

scene, selecting suitable camera angles and reinterpreting them on stage.

Reem Ayed summarized the workshop's outcomes, emphasizing the wealth of information provided about theatrical scenography, its history, origins and diverse applications in the world of theater. Participants were exposed to various practical exercises, including drawing theatrical perspectives, understanding ground measurements and professionally creating design models. She expressed her deep appreciation for Dr Hajri's friendly and encouraging approach, which motivated participants to work as a cohesive team and achieve their desired success.

The theatrical sanctuary program, now in its fifth edition, commenced in May and will continue until November. The program includes both theoretical and practical workshops, along with training laboratories that focus on three fundamental elements of theater: playwriting, scenography and acting. These efforts are part of LAPA's commitment to enriching the cultural landscape in Kuwait and harnessing the power of the arts to advance society.

Notably, LAPA will provide a theatrical training grant alongside each theater residency, offering talented youth an 18-month training program under the guidance of leading academics and theater artists. This initiative aims to empower young talents in Kuwait and the Arab world by providing access to professional training opportunities both within and outside Kuwait.

MEW opens office in Sabah Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT: Ministry of Electricity opened a customer service office in Sabah Al-Ahmad. Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewed Energy Dr Jassim Al-Ustad opened a customer service office at the "Government Mall" in residential Sabah Al-Ahmad City. The ministry is the first to open an office at the city's government mall.



KUWAIT: A customer service office is being opened in Sabah Al-Ahmad.



Iran on alert ahead of Mahsa Amini's death anniversary

Vietnam orders apartment block safety checks after deadly blaze Page 6

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Global aid effort intensifies for Libya

Scale of flood disaster 'shocking', 'heartbreaking': UN official



DERNA: A flash flood-damaged area is pictured in Derna on September 14, 2023. — AFP

DERNA: A global aid effort for Libya gathered pace Thursday after a tsunami-sized flash flood killed at least 4,000 people, with thousands more missing — a death toll the UN blamed in part on the legacy of years of war and chaos. The enormous surge of storm water burst two upstream river dams late Sunday and reduced the city of Derna to an apocalyptic wasteland where entire city blocks and untold numbers of people were washed into the Mediterranean.

"Within seconds the water level suddenly rose," recounted one injured survivor who said he was swept away with his mother in the late-night ordeal before both managed to cling onto and scramble into an empty building downstream. "The water was rising with us until we got to the fourth floor, the water was up to the second floor," the unidentified man said from his hospital bed, in testimony published by the Benghazi Medical Center.

"We could hear screams. From the window I saw cars and bodies being carried away by the water. It lasted an hour

or an hour and a half — but for us, it felt like a year." Hundreds of body bags now line Derna's mud-caked streets, awaiting mass burials, as traumatized and grieving residents search mangled buildings for missing loved ones and bulldozers clear streets of debris and mountains of sand.

"The scale of the flood disaster in Libya is shocking and it is heartbreaking," said UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths. "Entire neighborhoods have been wiped off the map. Whole families, taken by surprise, were swept away in the deluge of water. Thousands have died, tens of thousands are now homeless and many more remain unaccounted for."

'Wiped off the map'

The floods were caused by hurricane strength Storm Daniel, compounded by the poor infrastructure in Libya, which was plunged into turmoil after a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled and killed longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi. Libya is now

divided between two rival blocs—the UN-backed, internationally recognized government in Tripoli, and an administration based in the disaster-hit east.

UN World Meteorological Organization chief Petteri Taalas said many deaths could have been avoided if early warning and emergency management systems had functioned properly in the war-scarred country. With better coordination, "they could have issued the warnings and the emergency management forces would have been able to carry out the evacuation of the people, and we could have avoided most of the human casualties," said Taalas.

He told reporters in Geneva that Libya's years-long conflict meant its meteorological "observing network has been very much destroyed, the IT systems have been destroyed". "The flooding events came and there was no evacuation taking place, because there was not the proper early warning systems in place." The UN, United States, European Union and many Middle Eastern and North African na-

tions have either deployed or pledged to send rescue teams and aid including food, water tanks, emergency shelters, medical supplies and more body bags.

'Changing climate'

Access to Derna remains severely hampered as roads and bridges have been destroyed and power and phone lines cut to wide areas, where at least 30,000 people are now homeless. The catastrophe's true death toll remained unknown, and officials have provided conflicting numbers.

A total of 3,840 bodies had been recovered by Wednesday, said Lieutenant Tarek al-Kharraz, spokesman for the interior ministry of the administration ruling eastern Libya. But many more may have been washed out to sea or buried in the sand by the wall of muddy water that tore through the city.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has warned that 10,000 people are missing. Aid has been sent or promised by

numerous regional nations including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates as well as the Palestinians. The United States has also pledged to help, and in Europe the aid effort has been joined by Britain, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Romania.

Climate experts have linked the disaster to the impacts of a heating planet combined with Libya's decaying infrastructure. Storm Daniel gathered strength during an unusually hot summer and earlier lashed Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece, flooding vast areas and killing at least 27 people. "Storm Daniel is yet another lethal reminder of the catastrophic impact that a changing climate can have on our world," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk. Turk called on all sides in Libya "to overcome political deadlocks and divisions and to act collectively in ensuring access to relief." "This is a time for unity of purpose: all those affected must receive support, without regard for any affiliations." — AFP

Morocco quake brings farmers new hardships

INEGHEDE: Mohammed Al Moutawak's village was destroyed by Morocco's powerful earthquake and his apple harvest ruined, but he refuses to leave the land that is vital to small farmers like him. Drought and extreme weather have long taken a toll on the North African kingdom's growers, but the quake spells new challenges that are just beginning to come into focus.

"We thought hail was our worst enemy, but now we've got another," said the 56-year-old farmer from the mountain village of Ineghedeh in the worst-hit Al-Haouz region south of Marrakesh. "The earthquake, it has destroyed everything." Days after the quake that killed more than 2,900 people, he was looking sadly at his apple and walnut trees growing on terraces carved into the Atlas Mountains.

With dust-covered hands, he pointed to the trees his family has cultivated for generations and which still stand, unlike the stone and wood houses of his village. The September 8 disaster killed 11 of the hamlet's 200 inhabitants and left survivors living in yellow aid tents. The Golden and Gala apples Moutawak had expected to harvest now laid in the grass, their scent mingling with the stench of a decomposing donkey buried under the rubble. Because the fruit had not yet ripened, his harvest is lost, along with the profits he had hoped to use to settle his debts.

Basics of life

In the village, the search for survivors is over. All bodies have been recovered and everyone else is accounted for, unlike in other towns where rescue workers were still searching for signs of life, six days after the quake. Women were sorting through blankets and clothes delivered by civilians while men were digging through the rubble for the ba-



INEGHEDE: Farmer Mohammed Al Moutawak shows apples that fell prematurely from his trees during the earthquake that recently hit Morocco. — AFP

sics of daily life: glasses, pots and water cans.

As elsewhere in these mountains, small-scale farming, along with herding goats, cows and other livestock, is an essential source of food and income. "We work hard to raise a little money by harvesting apples, so that we can prepare for the start of the new school year and help our families a little," said another resident, Jamel Ait Bouyahia, 42.

In recent years, the Moroccan government and donors have pushed ahead with aid programs, some aimed at boosting resilience in the face of climate change. Other development initiatives have more specifically aimed to break through the isolation of village life and provide more autonomy to women. There have also been programs to reuse treated wastewater in agriculture, and to promote water-saving drip-irrigation.

Damaged water pipes

Access to water is now one of the biggest looming problems. "The sector most seriously affected by the earthquake is irrigation," said Bouyahia, who added that almost all the pipes had been destroyed. There is still water in the wells, but stones that shifted during the quake have blocked the flow from springs, said Moutawak.

Moroccan authorities say the problem is widespread in the region, with water networks also impacted in areas including Amizmiz, Moulay Brahim and Talat Nyacoub. The upcoming reconstruction efforts will serve as "a wake-up call for development workers", said Hlima Razkaoui, director of the group Care Maroc, which has worked extensively in the region. She said the effort will have to help people rebuild in a resilient way, with improved access to water, voicing hope that this will give communities "an opportunity to bounce back". — AFP

Putin, Kim gifted each other rifles

MOSCOW: Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un gifted each other rifles when they met in Far Eastern Russia, the Kremlin said on Thursday, confirming the isolated Russian leader will visit North Korea as Moscow woos another pariah state.

The Russian president, who has sought to strengthen alliances with other hardline leaders ostracized by the West, met with Kim on Wednesday amid speculation they would agree on an arms deal.

Putin "gave (Kim) a rifle from our production of the highest quality. In return, he also received a North Korean-made rifle," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Putin also gifted the North Korean leader a "glove from a space suit that has been to space several times."

Kim, who seldom leaves his country, held talks with Putin at the Vostochny cosmodrome. The Kremlin said his visit to Russia's Far East would last "a few more days." Moscow also confirmed that Putin "gratefully accepted Kim's invitation" to visit Pyongyang, which North Korean state television earlier announced.

Peskov said Moscow will first "quickly prepare" to send Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Pyongyang, with his trip expected in October, before a Putin visit can be arranged. It would be Putin's second trip to the world's most reclusive state, with which Russia shares a short border.

He visited Pyongyang in July 2000 to meet Kim's father Kim Jong-il, just months after being elected to the presidency. More than two decades later, Russia is facing unprecedented isolation from the West over Moscow's Ukraine offensive, with Putin seeking to boost Soviet-era alliances.

The head of South Korea's ruling party slammed what he called "a devil's deal" while Japan warned against any violations of UN bans on arms deals with the North after the Putin-Kim summit. "We are watching (the talks) with concerns including the possibility that it could lead to violations of the Security Council's ban on all arms-related material transactions with North Korea," Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters. — AFP

International

Vietnam orders apartment block safety checks after deadly blaze

Over 50 people killed in massive fire that engulfed high rise

HANOI: Vietnam on Thursday ordered nationwide checks on small apartment building blocks after a fire tore through a block in Hanoi, killing 56 people in the country's deadliest blaze in two decades. The fire started before midnight on Tuesday in the motorbike parking floor of the building, located down a narrow alley in a densely populated area of southwest Hanoi.

Neighbors and residents of the block said they heard screaming as people struggled to escape through barred windows. The building had only a single exit and no emergency ladder on the outside. One of the four sides had no windows at all, and another had only tiny ventilation slots.

Following the tragedy, police across the communist-run nation have been asked "to inspect fire prevention systems of mini apartment blocks and highly populated rent places". "Violations must be seriously punished," the ministry of public security said in an online statement. Hanoi police have arrested the owner of the building.

State media said Thursday that an initial investigation found the 10-storey block had breached its construction license, given in 2015, to build six stories. At least four children were among the victims. Thirty-seven other people were also injured. Several are still in shock after the accident, police and hospitals said. After the blaze was extinguished, photographs from the site showed a line of charred motorbikes in the parking area, soot-stained clothes on washing lines outside windows and a small rope ladder hanging from a balcony.

'Whole family' gone

Hundreds gathered outside a morgue in western Hanoi Wednesday, waiting to hear if their families and friends were victims of the fire. At the morgue in a military-owned hospital, officials appeared at the entrance every half hour to announce

through a loudspeaker that there was another victim for families to identify.

Holding out a photo on a mobile phone or simply describing the dead, medical workers asked desperate relatives if they recognized their loved ones. Cries broke out each time a match was found. Authorities tried to prevent families talking to journalists, but one man, who did not give his name, said his daughter had died and feared his wife had also perished. "I lost my daughter, who was staying with her mother," he said through tears. One group of five women, sitting on the floor outside the morgue, said their "whole family had gone". "They were our children and grandchildren," they said.

Elsewhere in the morgue, families who knew their loved ones had died sat waiting for hours to collect the bodies. One man, who gave his name as Dung, said his two young cousins, a man and a woman, were among the dead. They had come from their home in nearby coastal Thai Binh province to study. "They were at university here. Our family bought them this small apartment. We are waiting here to bring back them back to our home province for burial, but we don't know when they are going to release the body."

Densely populated

Vietnam has a population of 100 million people, a third of whom live in densely populated urban areas. According to official figures, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are the two locations with the nation's highest population density, with 2,398 and 4,363 people per square kilometers respectively.

To meet the demands for accommodation, Vietnam in 2014 legalized small apartment blocks, known locally as "mini apartments". They must comprise at least two fully-equipped apartments, with shared lifts or a staircase. These are mostly owned and built by private indi-



HANOI: This picture taken and released by the Vietnam News Agency (VNA) on September 13, 2023 shows rescue workers carrying victims following the fire. — AFP

viduals, and sometimes later resold or rented to low-income and migrant workers.

The fire this week was the deadliest in Vietnam since October 2002, when a blaze killed 60 people at the International Trade Centre in Ho Chi Minh City. But the country has experienced several serious fires in recent years, many at entertainment venues. A year ago, a karaoke bar blaze near

Ho Chi Minh City killed 32 people and injured 17. The owner was later arrested on charges related to breaching fire prevention regulations.

In the aftermath, the prime minister ordered an inspection of all high-risk venues. But many businesses have complained the regulations are too onerous. Some have struggled to meet the requirements and re-

main closed. Another 13 people died in 2016 in a karaoke venue in Hanoi following a fire.

Survivor Tran Thi Lien, 65, who bought her second-floor apartment in the block eight years ago, told AFP that residents had requested better fire safety equipment many times. "They still did not do it," she said. "When people die like this ... it causes so much suffering." — AFP

Houthis to visit war foes Saudi

SANAA: Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels are to fly to Riyadh for the first publicly announced visit since a Saudi-led military coalition opened hostilities in 2015, government and diplomatic sources said on Thursday. The Houthis' visit, expected in the coming days, will raise hopes of a breakthrough in the quagmire conflict that has left hundreds of thousands dead through direct and indirect causes such as famine.

It comes five months after Saudi officials held talks in Sanaa, and as a UN-brokered ceasefire

continues to largely hold despite officially lapsing in October. "There are preparations for a Houthi delegation to visit Riyadh within the next 72 hours," a Yemeni government official familiar with the situation told AFP. A Western diplomat in Yemen confirmed the visit, saying it may take place within the next two days. Saudi officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ali Al-Qhoom, a member of the Houthis' political council, also announced the visit on X, formerly known as Twitter. Yemen was plunged into war when the Houthis seized control of the capital Sanaa in September 2014, prompting the Saudi-led intervention the following March.

The ensuing fighting has forced millions from their

homes, causing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises in a country already pummeled by decades of conflict and upheaval. The six-month ceasefire that expired last October is still mostly holding but moves towards peace have been slow since the Saudi delegation visited Sanaa in April.

A delegation from Oman, which plays the role of mediator, arrived in Sanaa on Thursday, Yemeni government officials said — days after Saudi de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met Oman's sultan en route from the G20 summit in India. Qhoom, from the Houthis' political council, said the rebels' delegation would fly to Saudi Arabia on an Omani plane. "Optimism exists regarding the mediation and the Omani efforts to achieve peace in Ye-

men," he posted on X. The head of the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies think-tank, Majed al-Madhaji, told AFP that the Houthi visit "is like moving the relationship between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia from the back rooms to the living room". By organizing talks in Riyadh, both sides are "legitimizing this relationship and giving it an additional impetus".

"On the political level, it is an advanced step to end Saudi Arabia's direct role in Yemen and for the Houthis to acknowledge its role as a mediator," in addition to being one of the parties to the conflict. Moves towards peace in Yemen have accelerated since heavyweight regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran announced a surprise rapprochement in March, seven years after they broke off ties. — AFP

Humanity deep in the 'danger zone'

PARIS: Human activity and appetites have weakened Earth's resilience, pushing it far beyond the "safe operating space" that keeps the world liveable for most species, including our own, a landmark study said Wednesday. Six of nine planetary boundaries — climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, synthetic chemicals including plastics, freshwater depletion, and nitrogen use — are already deep in the red zone, an international team of 29 scientists reported.

Two of the remaining three — ocean acidification along with the concentration of particle pollution and dust in the atmosphere — are borderline, with only ozone depletion comfortably within safe bounds. The planetary boundaries identify "the important processes that keep the Earth within the kind of the living conditions that prevailed over the last 10,000 years, the period when humanity and modern civilization developed", said lead author Katherine Richardson, a professor at the University of Copenhagen's Globe Institute.

The study is the second major update of the concept, first unveiled in 2009 when only global warming, extinction rates, and nitrogen had transgressed their limits. "We are still moving in the wrong direction,"

said co-author Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and a co-creator of the schema.

"And there's no indications that any of the boundaries" — except the ozone layer, slowly on the mend since the chemicals destroying it were banned — "have started to bend in the right direction", he told journalists in a briefing. "This means we are losing resilience, that we are putting the stability of the Earth system at risk." The study quantifies boundaries for all nine interlocking facets of the Earth system.

For biodiversity, for example, if the rate at which species disappear is less than 10 times the average extinction rate over the last 10 million years, that is deemed acceptable. In reality, however, extinctions are occurring at least 100 times faster than this so-called background rate, and 10 times faster than the planetary boundary limit.

For climate change, that threshold is keyed to the concentration of atmospheric CO₂, which remained very close to 280 parts per million (ppm) for at least 10,000 years prior to the industrial revolution. That concentration is today 417 ppm, far above the safe boundary of 350 ppm. "On climate, we're still following a pathway that takes us unequivocally to disaster," said Rockstrom. "We're headed for 2.5C, 2.6C, or 2.7C — a place we haven't seen for the past four million years." "There's no evidence whatsoever that humans can survive in that environment," he added. — AFP

community that demanded a constitutional monarchy and an elected prime minister.

Then president Barack Obama imposed an arms embargo for four years. Bahrain returned to US good graces under former president Donald Trump, who hailed Bahrain's recognition of Zionist entity. Blinken said the United States would raise with the kingdom the issue of human rights with a goal of "ensuring that fundamental freedoms are protected, which contributes to Bahrain's progress." The government and activists on Tuesday reported an end to a prison hunger strike that involved at least 800 inmates and lasted 36 days, following an offer to improve conditions. — AFP

days, raising fears that they will push inflation higher and prompt central banks to keep interest rates higher for longer, which could in turn push economies into recession.

Last week, the price of Brent North Sea crude, the international benchmark, rose above \$90 per barrel for the first time since November 2022. The IEA said world oil demand remains on track to grow by 2.2 million bpd to 101.8 million bpd this year, partly due to resurgent Chinese consumption and jet fuel. But the extension of Saudi and Russian output cuts "will lock in a substantial market deficit" through the last three months of the year, it added. OPEC+ production has fallen by two million bpd so far while supply by countries outside the cartel has risen by 1.9 million bpd. Global supply will rise by 1.5 million bpd. — AFP

Drought, heat, fires threaten...

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"The fires affected us a lot," said Najla Chahine, 58, a former teacher. "We feared for our lives."

Green activism

Since those fires, "there's more awareness", said Chahine, noting however that the local community needs to work harder to face environmental threats because "the state is absent". She and her son Sami were on a hike as part of a recent local festival. Several dozen people clambered up and down tree-covered slopes carpeted with dry pine needles and cones. Sami Chahine, 13, said he has tried to "raise awareness as much as possible" about environmental issues among his friends. He expressed worry about fires, but also other ecological threats such as pollution, in a country where people often burn trash at informal dump sites and recycling is sporadic.

The hike passed several local springs, one reduced to just a trickle, another totally dry. Antoine Daher, head of the local non-governmental Council of Environment — Kobayat, blamed the water shortages on both a lack of rain and rising demand, urging people to reduce consumption. Daher said his association set up Lebanon's first fire watchtower some

25 years ago and had sought to educate people on ecological topics. Despite Lebanon's devastating economic crisis, he said, "we mustn't see the environment as a luxury".

Fires remain a major threat, and Khaled Taleb from the Akkar Trail association was training a group on how to prevent and fight them. "We are currently at the peak of the fire season," he said, warning that the risk only abates in late October. His association, which now counts 15 volunteers, turned to firefighting in 2020 after major blazes hit the Akkar region.

The area is covered with 200 square kilometers of forest and home to 73 out of Lebanon's 76 tree species, he said. The fires near Kobayat in 2021 alone "destroyed more than 1,800 hectares (4,450 acres)", he said, recalling that water access was a major problem for his team. In October 2019, the Beirut government's failure to contain devastating wildfires was among the triggers of an unprecedented, nationwide anti-government protest movement.

Lebanon "doesn't have the logistical capabilities to deal with a huge fire", said Taleb, whose group works alongside the civil defense and other first responders. However, he expressed optimism at the local community's willingness to pitch in. "We weren't born firefighters," he said, adding that until three years ago, "we didn't know anything about firefighting". "But our main priority now is to protect the forest from all threats." — AFP

US boosts Bahrain relations with...

Continued from Page 1

The agreement will focus "not only on security and defense, which is essential, but also on the economy, on people and on technology, which will be the foundation for a new global architecture," Prince Khalifa said. Bahrain came under criticism in 2011 when, backed by fellow Sunni kingdom Saudi Arabia, it crushed an uprising led by the Shiite

Saudi, Russian oil cuts 'will cause...'

Continued from Page 1

quarter," the Paris-based IEA said. "Oil stocks will be at uncomfortably low levels, increasing the risk of another surge in volatility that would be in the interest of neither producers nor consumers, given the fragile economic environment," it added.

Saudi Arabia has extended an oil production cut of one million barrels per day, which began in July, to the end of the year. Russia has decided to prolong a reduction in exports of 300,000 bpd over the same period. Oil prices have been rising in recent



KOBAYAT: People take part in a hike as part of the Rural Encounters on Environment and Film (REEF) festival near the town of Kobayat, around 140 kilometers north of the capital Beirut. — AFP

International

Iran on alert ahead of Mahsa Amini's death anniversary

Economic woes top of Iranians' minds: Activist

TEHRAN: Iran's government has warned it will not tolerate any signs of "instability" as the first anniversary nears of the death of Mahsa Amini and the months-long protests it sparked. Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, died on September 16 last year after her arrest in Tehran for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Her death triggered months of nationwide demonstrations under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom". Hundreds of people were killed in street clashes, including dozens of security personnel, before authorities moved to quell what they branded foreign-instigated "riots".

One year on, no plans for demonstrations have been overtly announced to mark the anniversary of Amini's death on Saturday, which is also a religious public holiday. President Ebrahim Raisi issued a warning in a television interview on Tuesday. "Those who intend to abuse Mahsa Amini's name under this pretext, to be an agent of foreigners, to create this instability in the country, we know what will happen to them," he said.

Security services will be vigilant, the deputy head of the judiciary, Sadeq Rahimi, said late last month. "The intelligence and security agencies are monitoring all the movements and will identify and deliver to judicial authorities those who want to... take to streets in the coming days and create problems," he warned. Last week, Iranian authorities shut down at least five social media pages and arrested the six individuals behind them, on accusations they were "organizing riots" for the anniversary.

Island struggles to cope with migrant surge

LAMPEDUSA: The tiny Italian island of Lampedusa struggled Thursday to cope with a surge in migrant boats from North Africa after numbers peaked at 7,000 people — equivalent to the entire local population. The local reception center, built to house fewer than 400 people, was overwhelmed with men, women and children forced to sleep outside on makeshift plastic cots, many wrapped in metallic emergency blankets.

Tensions broke out on Wednesday as food was being distributed by the Italian Red Cross, which runs the facility, causing police to intervene. Some young men later left the overcrowded center and went into Lampedusa's historic town center — where an AFP photographer found some of them queuing for ice-cream.

Several said they were hungry. Few had any money, and some restaurants turned them away. But other

'Traumatized'

Last year's wave of protests posed a major challenge for the Iranian government, which is also at odds with Western powers over its nuclear program and under punishing sanctions. "No incident in the history of the Islamic republic has driven such a wedge between the system and the people as the death of Mahsa Amini," said Fayyaz Zahed, a professor of contemporary history.

He said he believes the government "cannot solely rely on security and repressive responses" to contain the issue. Mohammad Sadegh Javadi-Hessar, a reformist activist based in the northeastern city of Mashhad, said many people "are still traumatized by last year's events". The months-long demonstrations, aside from the bloodshed, also saw thousands of people arrested.

In February, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared the end of the unrest and the defeat of the "plot" fomented by the "enemy", a reference to the Western governments and Iranian exiled opposition groups that backed the demonstrations. On Monday, Khamenei accused Iran's arch foe the United States of intending to exploit "issues they think can cause crisis in Iran" including that of women. Women in Iran have been required to cover their heads and necks since shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and encouraged to wear modest garments.

Economic pain

While last year's protests have cooled, many Iranian women, especially in the capital Tehran, have

establishments offered food for free, or residents and tourists paid for them. Located just 90 miles (around 145 kilometers) off the coast of Tunisia, Lampedusa is one of the first points of call for migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

Days of fine weather has seen a surge in arrivals in recent days, with more than 5,000 people arriving in Italy on Tuesday alone, according to interior ministry figures. Most are picked up at sea from rickety boats by the coastguard, which brings them to Lampedusa port. Almost 400 arrived Thursday in nine boats from Tunisia, media reports said. But many do not survive the journey by sea. More than 2,000 people have died this year crossing between North Africa and Italy and Malta, according to the UN migration agency. The latest victim was a five-month-old baby, who reportedly fell into the water early Wednesday as part of a group being brought to shore.

Critical situation

For years, Lampedusa's so-called migrant "hotspot" has struggled to cope with the arrivals, with humanitarian organizations reporting a lack of water, food and medical care. The Italian Red Cross took over in June promising to offer a more "digni-



TEHRAN: A woman speaks on a cell phone while walking along a street in Tehran on September 10, 2023. — AFP

been increasingly flouting the strict dress code. "The most remarkable effect the Mahsa movement had on Iranian society was the change in the society ... which has become more colorful and livelier," said Zahed. "Women's clothing has changed significantly," he said, also noting a shift to brighter colors.

Authorities have pushed back, installing surveillance cameras in public places to monitor violations and shutting businesses where rules have been breached. Iran's parliament has discussed a bill that would toughen penalties on those flouting the dress code. But not everyone backs the strict punishments. Prominent Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Makarem

Shirazi has expressed his rejection against using "violence and pressure" to impose the hijab headscarf. Reformist leaders have also denounced the recent dismissal of dozens of university professors.

Local media has quoted several professors as saying they were dismissed against the backdrop of their political views in support of the protest movement. While the issue of hijab remains critical, for many in Iran, where inflation hovers at nearly 50 percent, economic pain is a priority, said Javadi-Hessar, the activist. "The main demand of the people is the improvement of the economy, ahead of civil and political freedoms," he said. — AFP

Europeans exposed to BPA at higher levels than thought: Study

COPENHAGEN: A study done by the European Environment Agency (EEA) has found that 92 percent of participants in a study from 11 European countries had Bisphenol A (BPA), a hormone-disrupting chemical used in food packaging, in their urine. "Thanks to the EU's groundbreaking human biomonitoring research project we are able to see that Bisphenol A (BPA) poses a much more widespread risk to our health than previously thought," said Leena Ylä-Mononen, the EEA executive director, in a statement. "We must take the results of this research seriously and take more action at EU level to limit the exposure to chemicals that pose a risk to the health of Europeans".

The study indicates that BPA is present in almost all Europeans' bodies, posing a potential health risk, the European Environment Agency said Thursday. The Copenhagen-based EEA said the share of adults exceeding the recommended maximum levels ranged from 71 to 100 percent in the 11 countries studied, referring to levels outlined by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) in an April review. The EFSA at the time drastically reduced the recommended maximum daily intake of BPA allowed for consumers, slashing it by 20,000 times to 0.2 billionths of a gram, down from four millionths of a gram.

BPA, once used to make baby bottles until it was banned in Europe, the US and other nations a decade ago, is still used to make plastic for some food and drink packaging, meaning that most people are potentially exposed to it while consuming food and drink. Research has suggested it is linked to a range of health disorders linked to hormone disruption, such as breast cancer and infertility. France is the only country to have entirely banned BPA. The EU and US have limited its use and have flagged that they plan to reduce it further.

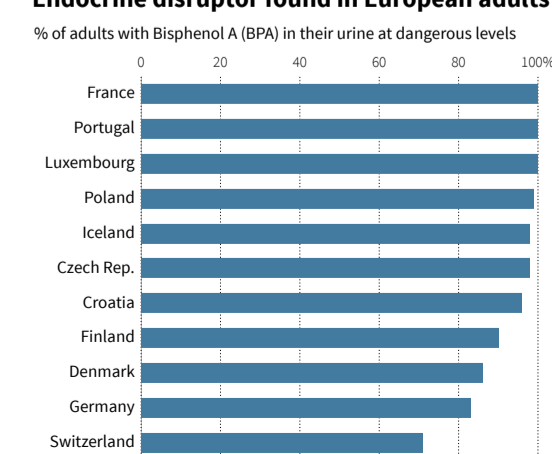
Agencies disagree

But there is disagreement over the tolerable daily amount of BPA that can be consumed over a lifetime without posing a risk to human health. The European Medicines Agency, which is responsible for approving drugs, has contested the EFSA's new maximum recommended levels. Criticizing the EFSA's methodology it has suggested the body has been too hasty "given that a causal link has not been demonstrated in a study in animals or humans". The EEA has nonetheless concluded that people's exposure to BPA "is well above acceptable health safety levels, according to updated research data." "This poses a potential health risk to millions of people," it said.

Levels of Bisphenol A, S and F were measured in the urine of 2,756 people in the 11 countries between 2014 and 2020. The countries were Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland.

Levels were lowest in Switzerland, where they exceeded the new maximum recommended levels in 71 percent of people studied, while they were exceeded in 100 percent of people in France, Luxembourg and Portugal, the EEA said. —AFP

Endocrine disruptor found in European adults



LAMPEDUSA: This aerial photograph taken on September 14, 2023 shows migrants gathering outside the operational center on the Italian island of Lampedusa. — AFP

AI helping firefighters battle wildfires

SAN DIEGO: When a wildfire erupted in the middle of a recent California night, it could have been a disaster. But thanks to a new monitoring system that uses artificial intelligence to scan for danger, firefighters were able to quell the blaze long before it got out of hand. "It was less than a quarter acre," Captain Kris Yeary of Cal Fire told AFP. "Had the AI not alerted us to it, it could have gotten much bigger."

Yeary, who is responsible for organizing firefighting over an area that includes Mount Laguna, around 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of San Diego, sprang into action around 3am on August 5 after a call from colleagues at a command center. Computers watching live feeds from the Cleveland National Forest spotted what their algorithm had been taught to understand was a column of smoke. Human operators were able to verify the machines were correct and alerted Yeary, whose firefighters quickly extinguished the flames. "It could have been a devastating fire," he said.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is a rapidly developing field of computing that seeks to mimic human abilities to "think." Over the last few years, its application has spread to include areas as diverse as weather fore-

casting, stock-picking, art and journalism. That has brought with it worries from people who fear it will do them out of their jobs — the writers' and actors' strike currently paralyzing Hollywood is in part about the use of AI in films and television. But firefighters battling California's wildfires say they will take all the help they can get. "AI is just another tool for us," said Yeary. "It's never going to replace firefighters."

Promising results

California experiences thousands of fires every year, which torch hundreds of thousands — sometimes



SAN DIEGO: Dr Neal Driscoll, principal investigator of the ALERTCalifornia program, speaks about the system of over 1,000 cameras and AI technology helping firefighters. — AFP

millions — of acres. Over the last decade, blazes have claimed more than 200 lives, and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, wreaking billions of dollars of damage. For several years firefighters have used a network of more than 1,000 cameras to monitor possible fire hotspots. Since the end of June, the ALERT-California system has had AI computers "watching" these feeds, and flagging to human operators when they see wisps of smoke that could be a fire — with promising results.

"Our success metric is the fires you never hear about," says Neal Driscoll, who heads the project for the University of California San Diego. "We beat 911 calls about 40 percent of the time. And it's going to get better." The addition of AI has meant each firefighter watching the dozens of feeds they are responsible for now has a helping hand. When the software believes it detects smoke, it displays a small red rectangle on the screen, and offers a percentage indicating its degree of certainty. It is then up to the operator to confirm the seriousness of the alert — and weed out any confusion.

Currently, the system can erroneously flag dust raised by tractors, insects in front of the camera or even a bit of fog. "When a cloud will go over ... it can cast a shadow on the ground and sometimes (the computer) can actually think that that's possibly smoke," says Suzann Leininger, an intelligence specialist at Cal Fire. The feedback that experts like Leininger give — no, that's just a bit of weather — is helping the AI to get better at what it does. But even in its current state, it's a boon. "It's getting us time to react in a faster manner," says Leininger. And when you're talking about fire, time can be everything. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

Al-Ghais hails OPEC's 'unique' role

'Fossil fuel still in demand despite contrary claims'

GENEVA: Haitham Al-Ghais, OPEC Secretary General, said on Thursday that the organization played a unique role and achieved several milestones since inception over six decades ago. In a press release commemorating its 63rd anniversary, Al-Ghais said, "OPEC is a unique organization that has stood the test of time."

"For more than six decades, OPEC has endeavored to support oil market stability in the interest of all producers and consumers, as well as the global economy at large, despite the challenges that have faced our industry. "The history of OPEC is replete with many achievements. We are grateful for the support of our Member Countries and the entire OPEC Family. I am confident that the Organization's best days lie ahead," the Secretary General added. Between September 10-14 1960, representatives from five oil-producing countries—Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela—gathered in the Al-Shaab Hall in Baghdad to found OPEC. This historic milestone marked the beginning of a new chapter in the oil industry.

The five founding members were soon joined by other oil-producing countries with mutual interests, such as supporting oil market stability and protecting the right of all countries to exercise permanent sovereignty over their natural resources in the interest of development. For 63 years, OPEC has called for cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect among all, as well as the need to address challenges in a collective manner and use oil to support national growth and advancement. The most vivid demonstration of that is the ongoing 'Declaration of Cooperation' process, whereby OPEC is cooperating with 10 non-OPEC producing countries to achieve stability in the global oil market. The 63rd Anniversary of OPEC is being celebrated in Luanda, Angola, on the sidelines of the Angola Oil and Gas Conference and Exhibition.

Meanwhile, OPEC said that fossil fuel was still in demand despite claims contrary to this fact. On



Haitham Al-Ghais

the International Energy Agency's (IEA) recent Op-Ed published on September 12, 2023, asserting that fossil fuel demand would peak before 2030, OPEC noted in a statement that consistent and data based forecasts do not support this assertion. It is an extremely risky and impractical narrative to dismiss fossil fuels, or to suggest that they were at the beginning of their end, indicated OPEC."

In past decades, there were often calls of peak supply, and in more recent ones, peak demand, but evidently neither has materialized. OPEC went on to say, "The difference today, and what makes such predictions so dangerous, is that they are often accompanied by calls to stop investing in new oil and gas projects." "Such narratives only set the global energy system up to fail spectacularly.

It would lead to energy chaos on a potentially unprecedented scale, with dire consequences for economies and billions of people across the world," said Al-Ghais. This thinking on fossil fuels is ideologically driven, rather than fact-based. It also does not take into account the technological progress the industry continues to make on solutions to help reduce emissions. Neither does it acknowledge that fossil fuels continue to make up over 80 percent of the global energy mix, the same as 30 years ago, or that the energy security they provide is vital. Technological innovation is a key focus for OPEC, which is why Member Countries are investing heavily in hydrogen projects, carbon capture utilization and storage facilities, the circular carbon economy, and in renewables too. While some may suggest that a number of these



oil-focused technologies are still immature, they ignore the fact that many technologies referenced in net-zero scenarios are at an immature, experimental or even theoretical stage. "In recent years, we have seen energy issues climb back to the top of the agenda for populations as many glimpse how experimental net zero policies and targets impact their lives. They have legitimate concerns.

How much will they cost in their current form? What benefits will they bring? Will they work as hyped? Are there other options to help reduce emissions? And what will happen if these forecasts, policies and targets do not materialize?" "Thankfully, there has been a reawakening across many societies of the need for energy security and economic development to go hand-in-hand with reduc-

ing emissions. In turn, this has led to a reevaluation by some policymakers on their approach to energy transition pathways," OPEC said. "Cognizant of the challenge facing the world to eliminate energy poverty, meet rising energy demand, and ensure affordable energy while reducing emissions, OPEC does not dismiss any energy sources or technologies, and believes that all stakeholders should do the same and recognize short- and long-term energy realities," said Al-Ghais.

In the interests of contributing to future overall global energy stability, OPEC will continue to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders to foster dialogue, that includes the views of all peoples, so as to ensure inclusive and effective energy transitions moving forward. — KUNA

ECB hikes rates again, maybe for last time

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank hiked a key interest rate to a record high Thursday as it battles stubbornly high inflation but indicated that its historic hiking cycle may be at an end. Policymakers raised borrowing costs by another quarter point, taking the closely-watched deposit rate to 4.00 percent — its highest level since the introduction of the euro in 1999.

It marked the 10th straight increase since the central bank launched the most aggressive hiking cycle in its history in July last year after energy and food costs surged following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The bank pushed ahead with another hike despite growing signs of a rapidly deteriorating economic outlook in the 20 countries that use the euro. But, while the ECB reiterated inflation was still "expected to remain too high for too long", it also said borrowing costs had reached levels that would help bring price rises back to the two-percent target in a timely manner.

Speaking after the rate decision was announced, ECB president Christine Lagarde stressed that rates had now reached levels that would make a "substantial contribution" to taming fast-rising prices.

She held back from making a firm commitment to no more increases, insisting that officials "can't say" yet that rates had peaked and future decisions would depend on incoming data.

Maersk unveils first bio-methanol container ship

COPENHAGEN: Danish shipping giant Maersk on Thursday launched the world's first container ship running on bio-methanol, a key step in its effort to lower its huge carbon footprint.

Maersk, which sold its oil division to TotalEnergies in 2017, has set out a target to become carbon neutral by 2040. European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen christened the Laura at an inauguration ceremony in Copenhagen's harbour, swinging a bottle of champagne across its hull to officially launch the ship.

The Laura will help reduce its CO2 emissions by 100 tons a day, compared to the same vessel running on fuel oil, Maersk said. Built in South Korea by Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) and fitted with a dual-fuel engine, the Laura is a relatively small model that will be able to transport 2,136 20-foot (TEU) containers. It will begin operating in the Baltic Sea in October, Maersk said.

"Green methanol is our fuel of choice ... because it is the only scalable solution that can meet the net-zero (carbon emissions) requirements," Maersk chief executive Vincent Clerc said at the inauguration ceremony. "Neither we nor the climate can af-

Policymakers divided

But analysts nevertheless believed the language indicated the current run of interest rate increases was ending. "The ECB's communication is clear: today was the last hike in the current cycle," said ING economist Carsten Brzeski.

Berenberg Bank economist Holger Schmieding agreed it was the final increase for now, and that the central bank had "signalled that it expects to be on hold from now onwards for a significant period of time". Observers had been divided ahead of the meeting about whether the ECB would pause or hike, and Lagarde conceded some on the 26-member governing council had wanted to stay their hand.

But she insisted a "solid majority" ultimately backed a hike and the discussion was neither "antagonistic" nor "adversarial".

Highlighting the continued difficulties in bringing consumer prices under control, the ECB raised its forecast for inflation this year and next. They lowered it slightly for 2025 to 2.1 percent, close to the ECB target. But it also slashed its forecasts for eurozone growth over the next three years, and Lagarde acknowledged the picture was worsening.

"The economy is likely to remain subdued in the coming months," she said. "The risks to economic growth are tilted to the downside."

German woes

Recent data showed second-quarter growth reached just 0.1 percent, lower than previously estimated, and the EU on Monday also slashed its 2023 and 2024 GDP forecasts for the single currency area — pointing in particular to weakness in Germany. Europe's top economy is struggling to get back on its feet after sliding into recession around the turn of the



FRANKFURT: President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde addresses a press conference following the meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on September 14, 2023. — AFP

year, hit by an industrial slowdown, high energy costs, and slowing exports to key partners such as China.

The weak data had fuelled calls for the ECB to pause its hiking cycle for fear it could deepen a downturn. Politicians in more indebted eurozone economies, including Italy and Portugal, have been urging the central bank to take its foot off the gas.

But despite the rapid increase in borrowing costs since last year, inflation has proved remarkably stubborn, coming in unchanged at 5.3 percent in August.

Price rises have slowed since peaks seen last year, in particular due to falling energy costs, but officials are now worried that other factors are keeping the pressure up — particularly wage increases in a tight labour market. — AFP

US retail sales accelerate on gas prices

WASHINGTON: Retail sales in the United States accelerated slightly in August, government data showed Thursday, as a spike in gas prices boosted sales at service stations. Sales in the world's top economy climbed 0.6 percent to \$697.6 billion last month, inching up from July's revised 0.5 percent bump, the Commerce Department said.

Economists had forecast a slowdown from July to August although consumers continued to spend—defying expectations that they would pull back more quickly as higher interest rates bite. Analysts do not foresee the current strength persisting, however, as the labor market gradually loses steam and student loan repayments weigh on spending.

The figures come after a mixed report Wednesday showing an uptick in consumer inflation, and as the US central bank weighs the need for further rate hikes to ease demand.

Excluding gas stations, retail sales in August picked up just 0.2 percent from July, markedly lower than the headline figure, according to Thursday's report. Among other segments, sales at food and beverage stores cooled, as did spending at general merchandise stores.

But gas station sales increased 5.2 percent from July to August, significantly higher than the prior month's 0.1 percent figure, said the Commerce Department.

"Most people have few alternatives to driving," noted economists at Pantheon Macroeconomics in a recent report. They added that gas station sales were likely boosted thanks to a 10.6 percent spike in gas prices. "Increased spending on gas in August likely was funded, at least in part, by cuts to households' discretionary spending," the Pantheon report said.

This could have bogged down sales in other areas. Consumption growth remains "on track for a strong gain" in the third quarter this year, economist Michael Pearce of Oxford Economics said in a note.

"But with job and wage growth slowing, student loan repayments restarting, and borrowing conditions still tightening, the headwinds to consumer spending are mounting," he added.

US wholesale prices rose by more than expected in August as demand for energy surged, the government reported Thursday. The bigger-than-expected rise in the producer price index (PPI) highlighted the impact of the recent rise in energy prices on both consumers and producers.

On Wednesday, headline consumer inflation also rose, fueled by rising energy costs.

Wholesale prices rose by 0.7 percent in August, building on a revised 0.4 percent increase a month earlier, according to data from the Labor Department. This was higher than the median forecast of economists surveyed by MarketWatch.

The recent rise in producer and consumer inflation figures is likely to add pressure on the US Federal Reserve's rate-setting committee, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), which meets to set its key lending rate next week. — AFP



COPENHAGEN: EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (sixth left) with ship staff during a name-giving ceremony for the world's first methanol-enabled container vessel of A.P. Moller-Maersk in Copenhagen on September 14, 2023. — AFP

ford complacency or waiting for other solutions to emerge in the late 2020s," he added.

On a global scale, maritime transport is more polluting than air transport, according to the Higher Institute of Maritime Economics (ISEMAR). The sector accounts for 2.89 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions, according to the figures published by the International Maritime Organization.

Last year Maersk unveiled a big strategic plan to gradually abandon the use of fuel oil in order to meet the greenhouse gas reduction targets set by the European Union as part of the Paris agreements. Green methanol, also known as "e-methanol", is composed of waste carbon dioxide (CO2) and "green hydrogen", which is created by using renewable energy to split water molecules. — AFP

Business

Argentina's inflation rate hits 12.4%, highest in 3 decades

Peso devalued by 21% in August after deal with IMF

Buenos Aires: Argentina recorded an inflation rate of 12.4 percent in August, the highest monthly change in over three decades in a country dogged by chronic economic instability, its statistics agency said Wednesday. Prices also rose 124 percent over the past 12 months, according to a report by the Indec agency published a little over a month before general elections.

"There is nothing, no money to save. We live day to day," said teacher Karina Sablich, while doing her grocery shopping. Economy Minister Sergio Massa, who is running for president, said Wednesday that "August has been one of the worst months... of the past 30 years" for Argentina's economy, blaming an "imposition by the International Monetary Fund."

The increase in inflation had been expected after the peso was devalued by 21 percent in August, which had been agreed with the IMF in order to unblock part of a \$44 billion loan package.

The last time monthly inflation hit double digits was in April 2002, when it stood at 10.4 percent. Prior to that the highest monthly rate was recorded at 27 percent in February 1991. The prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages saw the highest jump in August, of 15.6 percent. "An anti-inflationary plan is needed, but obviously that won't happen until" a new government takes over in December, said economist Victor Beker, from the University of Belgrano.

'The saddest thing'

Argentines are no stranger to inflation woes, with several periods of hyperinflation in the late

eighties and early nineties, which reached up to 3,000 percent. To exit that crisis, the government pegged the currency to the US dollar, but a worsening economic situation made that untenable by 2001.

When the peso was uncoupled from the greenback, its value plummeted, causing a run on banks as people's savings were wiped out, and deadly social unrest.

A few days after that devaluation, Argentina defaulted on its foreign debt, further deepening its economic and social crisis. Since then, Argentina has battled with boom and bust cycles, inflation, currency devaluations, and debt restructuring.

"We continue despite everything, knowing that for now things are not going to change," said the teacher Sablich. "That's the saddest thing about being in this country right now, the uncertainty, that we don't know how we're going to get out, who's going to get us out, how we're going to do it."

'A disgrace'

Many weary Argentines are backing a radical political outsider in October's presidential race. Buenos Aires lawmaker Javier Milei, who has vowed to dynamite the central bank and dollarize the economy, in August scored the most votes in a joint primary election between all parties, seen as a litmus test for the main vote.

His main rivals will be former security minister Patricia Bullrich on the right, and economy minister Massa from the ruling center-left coalition. Bullrich slammed the inflation figures on social media as "a



Buenos Aires: People line up in front of a butcher shop next to signs with meat prices in Buenos Aires on September 11, 2023. — AFP

disgrace," saying they "summed up the tragedy" left by Massa and the rest of the government.

Massa, scrambling to ease the pressure on citizens' pockets, on Monday announced an increase in the minimum taxable monthly income to

1.7 million pesos (\$4,850 official rate, \$2300 on the parallel market). This is double the previous amount, and would leave fewer than 800,000 people in the country of 45 million paying income tax, Massa said. — AFP

Former Starbucks CEO Schultz steps down from board

New York: Starbucks said Wednesday its former chief executive Howard Schultz will step down from the coffee chain's board of directors "as part of a planned transition."

Schultz, who ended his third stint as CEO in March, helped transform the brand from a small coffee shop into an international chain over the decades. "I look forward to support-

ing this next generation of leaders to steward Starbucks into the future as a customer, supporter and advocate in my role as chairman emeritus," the longtime Starbucks leader said in a statement.

In 2017, Schultz stepped aside as chief executive after his second tenure, handing the reins to Kevin Johnson. He later announced his retirement from the company and weighed a run for US president.

When Johnson left in 2022 after five years at the helm, Schultz returned as interim CEO, before Laxman Narasimhan took over the position in March this year. In the company's statement on Wednesday, it also announced that Wei


Zhang, most recently a senior advisor to Alibaba Group, has been elected to the board of directors effective October 1. Starbucks has in recent times come under fire over its confrontational approach to unionization, with Schultz defending against allegations it had violated US labor laws in countering the campaign.

In a hearing convened by progressive Senator Bernie Sanders earlier this year, Schultz said he was unaware of instances where workers were fired or relocated to other stores because of union activity.

Today, the Seattle-based corporation has more than 36,000 stores in 86 markets globally, according to the company. — AFP



New York: Former Chairman and CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, speaks during the presentation of his book 'From The Ground Up' on January 28, 2019 in New York City. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	926	925	926	910	16	21,013,467	5	0.54%	-9.90%	916	940	13.9	1.76	3.7%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	249	253	253	248	5	17,733,734	1	0.40%	-15.40%	248	253	12.5	1.17	3.8%	1.31
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	160	158	160	156	4	16,385,595	-3	-1.86%	-11.80%	156	160	16.3	0.59	2.3%	1.12
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	195	192	196	190	6	866,046	-1	-0.52%	-7.95%	191	202	19.6	0.75	3.9%	1.31
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	751	747	753	742	11	33,770,554	2	0.27%	-0.16%	744	762	19.5	1.91	2.2%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	617	622	622	613	9	4,759,988	12	1.97%	-17.38%	618	642	40.9	2.54	0.9%	1.22
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	134	137	137	131	6	1,953,055	3	2.24%	-9.87%	133	141	9.6	0.62	3.7%	1.83
204	National Investments	Financial Services	227	239	248	225	23	10,530,247	6	2.58%	0.84%	237	248	192.2	1.11	11.4%	1.99
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	123	122	125	122	3	19,741,852	-1	-0.81%	8.93%	122	126	30.8	0.72	0.0%	0.99
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	167	168	171	164	7	42,353,524	8	5.00%	49.01%	162	172	31.9	1.26	2.3%	1.16
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	168	164	169	162	7	17,430,557	2	1.23%	23.31%	163	166	9.7	1.18	4.5%	1.68
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	67.5	66.3	69.6	66.3	3.3	4,386,994	-4	-5.69%	-11.48%	65.5	67.3	-	0.42	13.5%	1.29
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	161	160	163	159	4	20,756,143	-2	-1.23%	52.59%	158	166	14.7	1.14	1.8%	1.08
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	850	862	894	835	59	4,111,637	26	3.11%	7.75%	863	880	18.3	1.96	1.5%	1.07
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	103	102	103	101	2	14,428,619	0	0.00%	6.23%	102	105	18.8	0.64	2.8%	0.60
501	National Industries	Financial Services	225	223	226	219	7	5,187,348	-4	-1.76%	7.90%	217	226	158.9	1.07	2.1%	1.59
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,212	1,252	1,274	1,212	62	3,283,669	37	3.05%	3.05%	1,226	1,260	14.0	1.17	4.8%	1.06
506	HEISCO	Industrials	675	683	695	672	23	1,646,935	-25	-3.53%	11.42%	668	700	20.0	1.75	3.0%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	728	717	739	717	22	6,380,319	-23	-3.11%	-10.38%	708	722	11.0	1.41	8.1%	0.92
603	Agility	Industrials	575	568	580	564	16	11,693,269	-7	-1.22%	-21.11%	566	583	21.3	0.77	0.0%	1.54
605	Zain	Telecommunications	504	505	511	503	8	11,124,393	-5	-0.98%	-10.30%	503	512	10.4	1.77	6.9%	0.65
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,255	3,218	3,300	3,210	90	724,861	-9	-0.28%	-4.01%	3,200	3,250	9.5	3.93	11.8%	0.66
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	175	169	176	167	9	3,750,467	-4	-2.31%	-16.75%	167	171	-	0.73	0.0%	1.16
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,620	1,490	1,620	1,490	130	1,605,495	-180	-10.78%	-21.58%	1,485	1,571	18.0	10.77	5.0%	1.48
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	83.2	81.4	83.3	80.5	2.8	23,400,280	0.4	0.49%	7.11%	81.1	83.3	8.8	0.94	6.1%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	198	195	199	193	6	22,744,105	-6	-2.99%	-14.53%	193	196	27.5	1.06	1.5%	1.13
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	521	533	534	520	14	3,243,473	12	2.30%	35.62%	519	541	78.6	1.58	2.3%	0.46
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	431	429	433	425	8	3,502,579	14	3.37%	15.95%	425	435	40.2	1.71	3.5%	0.71
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	192	195	196	190	6	1,761,952	1	0.52%	3.72%	193	198	15.7	1.76	6.2%	0.44
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,945	1,995	2,000	1,945	55	972,872	5	0.25%	-2.78%	1,971	2,005	25.5	7.05	4.3%	0.95
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,132	1,173	1,194	1,115	79	1,808,246	-11	-0.93%	45.71%	1,140	1,175	14.7	4.50	5.9%	0.17

* As of end of week closing

Business

China: EU car subsidy probe will have 'negative impact'

Beijing slams the move as 'naked protectionism'

BEIJING: China warned on Thursday a probe by the European Union into Beijing's subsidies for electric cars would have a negative impact on its trade relations with the bloc, which it accused of "naked protectionism".

The investigation could see the EU impose duties on cars it believes are unfairly sold at a lower price, undercutting European competitors. China "believes that the EU's proposed investigative measures are to protect its own industry in the name of 'fair competition'... and will have a negative impact on China-EU economic and trade relations", a commerce ministry statement said.

It said the investigation was "naked protectionist behavior that will seriously disrupt and distort the global automotive industry supply chain, including the EU". European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the anti-subsidy investigation on Wednesday, vowing to protect the bloc against unfair competition. The move was hailed as a "positive signal" by European automakers and EU member states.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said during a visit to Berlin the probe was a "very good decision", while Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck said it showed the "right attitude" and was about tackling "unfair competition".

Beijing has already hit back against the probe, with Wang Lutong, director-general of the Chinese foreign ministry's department of European affairs, saying "many EU members subsidise their electric vehicle industries".

"In what position is the commission to launch anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles from China?" he said. But there have long been concerns across Europe about how much the continent relies on Chinese products, especially those needed for the EU's focus on clean energy.

The EU's internal market chief Thierry Breton warned last week about a trend emerging where Europe was "being relegated to net imports of electric vehicles or solar panels".

China could overtake Japan to become the world's largest car manufacturer this year, according to some experts. European manufacturers also have to contend with state subsidies for electric vehicles across the Atlantic. Beijing called on the EU on Thursday "to carry out dialogue and consultation with the Chinese side, create a fair, non-discriminatory and predictable market environment for the joint development of the China-EU electric vehicle industry."

China "will pay close attention to the protectionist tendency and follow-up actions of the European side, and firmly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises".

A source at the French finance ministry said Thursday that Beijing's response was "a bit of an overreaction". "We are opening an investigation. We're not presuming the result," said the source on condition of anonymity. "We must stay rational and not jump to hasty conclusions." — AFP



SUZHOU, China: In this photo taken on September 11, 2023, BYD electric cars waiting to be loaded on a ship are stacked at the international container terminal of Taicang Port at Suzhou Port, in China's eastern Jiangsu Province. — AFP

News in Brief

THG dives as losses deepen

LONDON: Shares in British online retailer The Hut Group tumbled almost one fifth on Thursday after posting worsening losses on rampant inflation. THG, which sells cosmetic and nutrition products, said in a statement that its net loss jumped by a quarter to £133 million (\$166 million) in the first half of the year from a year earlier. The news sent its share price slumping 17 percent to 72.61 pence on the London stock market. "Inflationary pressures provided significant challenges to consumers and businesses alike over the past 18 months," said THG chief executive Matthew Moulding. — AFP

Bulgaria lifts ban on grain imports

SOFIA: Bulgaria decided on Thursday not to extend a ban on Ukrainian grain imports in five eastern EU nations that is set to expire this week. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has closed off Black Sea shipping routes used before the war, resulting in the EU becoming a major transit route and export destination for Ukrainian grain. But in June, the EU agreed to restrict Ukrainian grain imports to five member states, seeking to protect their farmers who blamed the imports for a slump in prices on local markets. The five member states are Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The Polish government decided Tuesday to extend the ban, which expires on Friday. Bulgaria's parliament, however, voted 124-69 on Thursday for a resolution to end the ban, citing "solidarity with Ukraine" and the need to "guarantee food security on a global scale". — AFP

Germany blocks sat startup takeover

FRANKFURT: Germany has blocked a complete Chinese takeover of a satellite startup on national security grounds, sources close to the matter told AFP Thursday, as Berlin takes an increasingly hard line against Beijing. Concerned at the heavy reliance of Europe's top economy on China, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government has been pushing to "de-risk" and dial back dependencies. The German tech company KLEO Connect aims to establish its own network of satellites in low Earth orbit that can provide internet to remote locations, hoping to rival Starlink. The strategic importance of space telecommunications has been highlighted by the Ukraine war where Starlink, operated by Elon Musk-owned company SpaceX, has become a key battlefield tool for Kyiv. — AFP

Australian lender shuts HK office

HONG KONG: Australia Bank (NAB), a major lender in the Asia-Pacific region, announced on Thursday its decision to pull out from Hong Kong, leaving Shanghai as its last operational base in China. NAB is the second major Australian financial institution to be leaving the Chinese financial hub this year, following the exit in June of Westpac, which was fined by Hong Kong authorities for breaching anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism rules. The move is expected to impact about 50 jobs in Hong Kong, including staff in the treasury, finance, risk, legal and technology departments. "A small number of corporate and institutional bankers" would also be affected, with some to be offered re-employment and relocation, NAB said. — AFP

Midnight strike looms large for Detroit car giants

DETROIT: The head of the US auto workers union announced plans on Wednesday to strike against the three major Detroit car manufacturers, saying the two sides remain far from a new agreement. "We are preparing to strike these companies in a way they've never seen before," United Auto Workers (UAW) president Shawn Fain said of General Motors, Ford and Stellantis.

If no agreement is reached, a stoppage could begin at a limited number of plants Friday morning and gradually expand as talks continue, leading to an increasingly heavy economic hit.

Fain, appearing in a webcast briefing less than 48 hours before the current contracts expire, said negotiators were "making progress" but "we're still very far apart." For months, the UAW president has vowed a tough approach to negotiations, demanding significant pay hikes in light of record profits and saying workers could strike at all three companies at once for the first time ever.

Industry sources have expressed guarded optimism about averting a stoppage, noting that Fain's tough tone could be part of a bargaining strategy to win a better deal. While a last-minute agreement remains possible, the wariness at companies grew Wednesday morning after the UAW announced a rally for Friday afternoon in downtown Detroit with Fain and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, one of Congress's staunchest champions of organized labor.

GM said in a statement Wednesday night that it continues "to bargain in good faith." "We are making progress in key areas that

we believe are most important to our represented team members," GM said, referring to the auto workers. "This includes historic guaranteed annual wage increases, investments in our US manufacturing plants to provide opportunities for all, and shortening the time for in-progression employees to reach maximum wages."

Stellantis, the parent company of Chrysler, said it was "still awaiting the UAW's response to the offer we presented yesterday." "Our focus remains on bargaining in good faith to have a tentative agreement on the table before the collective bargaining agreement expires," the company said.

The sharpest response came from Ford, which has more union-represented workers than the other two companies. CEO Jim Farley said Ford had also not received a counteroffer to its latest proposal.

"We should be working creatively to solve hard problems rather than planning strikes and PR events," Farley said in a statement. "Please remember that Ford, more than any other company, has bet on the UAW and treated the UAW with respect," he said. "The future of our industry is at stake. Let's do everything we can to avert a disastrous outcome."

Auto show upstaged

A strike could begin at 12:01 Friday morning with a few locals. The aim is to "keep the companies guessing" and maximize union leverage as negotiations continue, Fain said. Uncertainty about the labor situation has hung over the Detroit Auto



People attend the 2023 North American International Auto Show at the Huntington Place convention center in Detroit, Michigan, on September 13, 2023. — AFP

Show, which kicked off Wednesday morning, and posed a new challenge to President Joe Biden. Formerly held in January, the event, officially known as the North American International Detroit Auto Show, was rebooted as an autumn occurrence in 2022 with a primary focus on retail consumers. Ford kicked off this year's proceedings with a Tuesday night celebration of its updated F-150, while GM and Stellantis unveiled new vehicles at boisterous press conferences Wednesday morning. But many in and around the auto industry are much more focused on the labor situation.

The UAW represents about 150,000 workers at the three companies. Fain has targeted a 40 percent wage increase commensurate with hikes in CEO pay in recent years. During his briefing, Fain reviewed each of the latest proposals in his presentation. The

current wage hikes proposed are 20 percent at Ford, 18 percent at GM and 17.5 percent at Stellantis, he said.

The companies have rejected key union demands on job security pledges and eliminating different wage "tiers" among workers, Fain said. Fain also said cost-of-living provisions were inadequate.

Biden, who has sought to brandish his union ties while avoiding threats to the economy heading into an election year, weighed in last month, saying the UAW "deserves a contract that sustains the middle class" while urging "all sides to work together." Former president Donald Trump entered the fray on Wednesday, saying the UAW should "make the complete and total repeal of Joe Biden's insane Electric Vehicle mandate their top, non-negotiable demand in any strike." — AFP



DOHA: Academics and tech experts discuss activating collaboration frameworks to foster technical talent development in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Huawei's 2023 global program delves into ICT talent in Mideast

KUWAIT: At the 2023 edition of Huawei's global program "Seeds for the Future" in Doha, Qatar, industry leaders and academicians delved into the current state of ICT talent in the Middle East region and challenges in the broader digital transformation agenda, emphasizing the crucial need to elevate the skill set of the younger generation. Participants recognized the significance of aligning youth skills with the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Under the overarching theme of "ICT Talent and Youth Power Driving Digital Innovation and Shaping the Sustainable Future of the MECA Region," Dr Khalid Al-Begain, president of Kuwait College of Science and Technology, joined other luminaries in a panel discussion featuring academics and tech experts from the Middle East and Central Asia with the participation of over 175 students from 15 countries.

Prominent figures from academia, the technology sector, research institutions, and training organizations participated in the seminar including Dr Ahmed K Elmagarmid, Executive Director of Qatar Computing and Research Institute, QCRI, Qatar Foundation; Reem Almugbel, Vice Governor of Planning & Business Development at Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, TVTC-KSA; Rustam Karimjonov, Deputy Minister of Digital Technologies of the Republic of Uzbekistan; and Maya Zhu, Global CSR Lead, Huawei Public Affairs and Communications Department.

During the exchange, presenters emphasized the im-

portance of collaboration, innovation, and enhancing the culture of innovation in the region and the necessity of nurturing local technical talents to pave the way for sustainable digital futures built upon knowledge.

The attendees also stressed the need to enrich university curricula and teaching systems with practical training provided by experienced technology companies to prepare graduates for active participation in driving social and economic progress in their countries, aligning with current national plans, strategies, and visions that focus on maximizing the use of technology. The participants acknowledged the importance of activating further cooperation and partnership frameworks between the public and private sectors in training young technical talents.

Dr Al-Begain said: "Artificial Intelligence holds immense potential to transform societies. Nurturing ICT talent is pivotal to realizing this potential, and global technology leaders must collaborate with government entities to expedite its progress." One global tech company spearheading such public-private partnerships in talent development is Huawei, which has invested heavily to help equip Kuwait's talent with the necessary skills to compete in the global marketplace. Based on the company's pursuit of an open and shared ICT talent ecosystem, the company has collaborated effectively with local entities such as the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), CAIT (Central Agency for Information and Technologies), and Youth Public Authority (YPA) to create a positive, long-lasting impact.

To further contribute to local ICT talent development, Huawei has also partnered with leading education institutions like the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) and Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) to establish Huawei ICT Academies at their respective campuses, which provide industry training and certification to their students. In addition, the company launched the Huawei

Innovation and Training Center in Hamra Tower to transfer knowledge to Kuwaiti students.

Additionally, Huawei and the Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) partnered with a Huawei 5G Lab and 5G Star simulation training system as part of the Huawei ICT Academy at KCST last year. The collaboration will boost ICT talent development across the country and facilitate new digital business models, supporting economic transformation in line with Kuwait's Vision 2035.

These initiatives underscore the need to bridge the gap between classroom teaching and real-world industry demands. While our universities have endeavored to nurture talent and rank highly in ICT curriculums, a rapidly shifting digital landscape places new demands on the IT workforce.

"As university administrators, we cannot produce graduates ready for every industry; our role is to produce graduates capable of learning and acquiring new knowledge needed for their businesses. Therefore, we will benefit immensely from any help from the private sector to shape the talent needs of the industry. And that's why we are very grateful to have Huawei engaged in the Seeds for the Future initiative," Dr Al-Begain added.

Seeds for the Future is part of Huawei's corporate social responsibility efforts and reflects its collaboration with the region's government, private, and academic institutions. It aims to contribute to developing the digital economy and global ecosystem by empowering technical talents. With a growing emphasis on innovation and technological progress, the program provides young individuals with a distinctive platform to exchange ideas and connect with peers worldwide. It offers valuable insights into the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, enabling participants to shape their future and actively engage in the digital society.

Lifestyle



Works by French jeweler Andre Chervin and his New York atelier, Carvin French, are displayed at an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society in New York. — AFP photos

FRENCH MASTER JEWELER'S ART ON DISPLAY IN NEW YORK

Miniature lamps encrusted with diamonds and rubies; animals and plants carved out of gold and emerald: reclusive French master jeweler Andre Chervin, who has supplied the world's most elite brands, is finally putting his own art on display in New York. "This collection represents a lifetime of work," Chervin, 95, said in a statement to the New-York Historical Society. "I was able to choose myself what to make, and when, and exactly how I wanted them. I was free from the constraints that naturally come when you are manufacturing for a customer's order."

Born in Paris in 1927 into Jewish family, he received his training at the prestigious Haute Ecole de Joaillerie in the French capital and emigrated to New York in 1951. There, together with

another aspiring French jeweler, Serge Carponcy, and with \$2,000 in hand he founded the atelier Carvin French in the heart of Manhattan, which for decades has supplied jewelry to top names such as Tiffany and Co., Van Cleef & Arpels, Cartier and Bulgari. Chervin shies away from public attention and does not grant interviews. "This exhibition was never envisioned by my father. In fact, it was not easy for me to convince him that there even should be an exhibition," his daughter and vice president of the atelier Carole Chervin told AFP. "He's a very private man, humble, modest. He did all of this work, as I said, as a passion... he wasn't seeking publicity."

Miniature masterpieces

In addition to brooches, bracelets,

rings and earrings in diamond, sapphire, emerald, ruby, gold and silver, the exhibit will feature wonders of decorative art produced by Chervin's small workshop, which still operates to this day. Among them is a boudoir lamp, titled "My Heavy Heart," composed of a citrine heart mounted on an 18-carat gold wheelbarrow overflowing with colored diamond flowers, and a bedside lamp "The Frogs' Rubies," made of ruby slabs.

There is also a strawberry bush with fruits carved out of red coral with nephrite leaves. These objects, taken for the first time from Chervin's home in New York, show that the artist "has a very close relationship and a very touching relationship with nature," said exhibit curator Debra Schmidt Bach. "He's a great admirer of nature."

Chervin has been at the helm of Carvin French for 60 years, and Schmidt Bach says among his strengths has always been finding and cultivating talented artisans, many of them from overseas. "Andre says that he felt sometimes like he was a conductor, conducting an orchestra of incredible talents and artisans who had amazing skills," she added.

New York was another key factor to Chervin's success. "The reason we were able to attract such a wonderful roster of jewelers, lapidaries and artisans is because it was in New York," said Carole Chervin. "It was a veritable United Nations of talent as my father says." — AFP



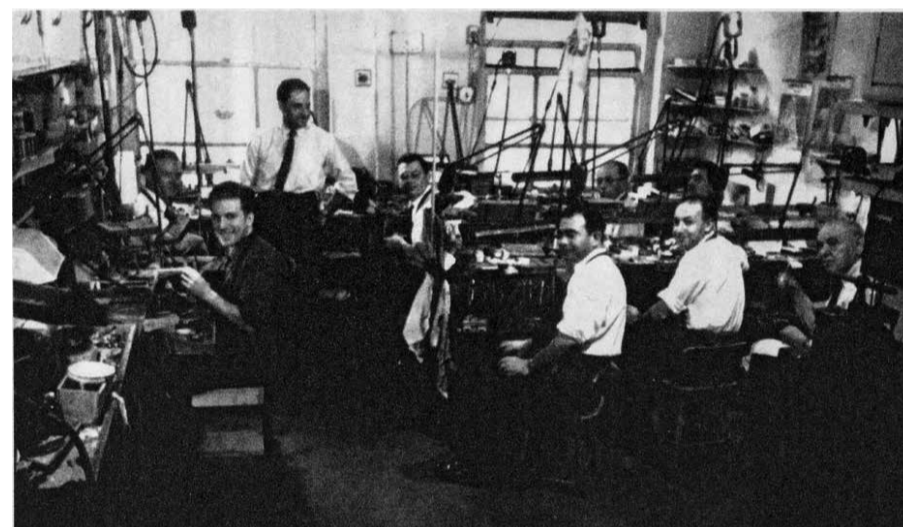
This 2014 handout picture provided courtesy of Carvin French Jewelers on September 11, 2023, shows French jeweller Andre Chervin in New York City.



Works by French jeweler Andre Chervin and his New York atelier, Carvin French, are displayed at an exhibition.



Carole Chervin, daughter of French jeweler Andre Chervin, stands before works by her father and his New York atelier Carvin French, displayed at an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society in New York.



This 1957 handout picture provided courtesy of Carvin French Jewelers shows French jewelers Serge Carponcy (back L, seated) and Andre Chervin (standing) in their atelier in New York City.

Musk biography describes troubled tycoon driven by demons

A hotly anticipated biography of Elon Musk describes the turbulent tycoon as a man driven by childhood demons, obsessed with bringing human life to Mars and who demands that staff be "hardcore." "Elon Musk" is written by star biographer Walter Isaacson, a former editor in chief of Time magazine who is best known for his best-selling portrayal of Apple founder Steve Jobs as well as his looks into the lives of Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci.



Some US media outlets got early access to the more than 600-page book ahead of its official global release Tuesday, and several excerpts were published in recent days. Hours before its release on Amazon, advance orders had made "Elon Musk" the site's best-selling book in the United States.

Much of the billionaire's early life is already well known, with attention focused on his abusive and manipulative father Errol, who Musk despises. The book

proposes that Musk is driven by what his former partner Grimes calls the "demon mode", which, according to Isaacson, makes him highly productive and is common among overachievers.

Many of the account's unknown nuggets come from a more recent period, when Isaacson shadowed his subject with fly-on-the-wall access into his everyday life. A widely reported passage recounts how Musk personally scuttled a plan by the Ukrainian military to carry out a major operation in Crimea by denying Starlink internet access, drawing a furious response from Kyiv. But Isaacson was forced to walk back his description of the episode after Musk tweeted that the Starlink access was not yet up and running in Crimea at the time of his decision.

Musk's chaotic and impulse-driven takeover of Twitter (now renamed X) also gets a lot of attention, with the billionaire seen as struggling to recognize that technology and sheer will power will not create miracles. Another recurring theme in Isaacson's telling is Musk's vindictive tendencies toward doubters and critics.

Lacks 'Critical lens'

After acquiring Twitter late last year, Musk and his closest lieutenants combed through email and social media, and immediately fired dozens of employees who had criticized the new owner. Eventually two-thirds of the 7,500 strong staff would be axed. In another episode, Musk defied warnings and with the help of a small team moved critical servers out of a Sacramento data center to cut costs, which led to a series of major outages. He also refused to join forces with Bill Gates on charity endeavors because the Microsoft founder had bet against the success of Tesla on the stock market.

The book also says that Musk, who frets about depopulation, now has 10 children, including a previously unknown child with on-and-off-again partner Grimes. He has also fathered twins as a sperm donor with Shvion Zilis, an executive at Musk-owned company Neuralink.

Reviews of the book have been mixed, with the Washington Post praising the reporting but disappointed that Isaacson "prioritized revealing anecdotes and behind-the-scenes reportage over a sophisticated critical lens." — AFP

Dutch 'Indiana Jones' art sleuth recovers stolen Van Gogh

A Dutch art detective has recovered a precious Vincent van Gogh painting that was stolen from a museum in a daring midnight heist during the coronavirus lockdown three-and-a-half years ago, police said Tuesday. Arthur Brand took possession of the missing painting, the 1884 "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring", worth between three and six million euros (\$3.2 and \$6.4 million), at his Amsterdam home on Monday, stuffed in a blue IKEA bag. Brand, dubbed the "Indiana Jones of the Art World" for tracing a series of high-profile lost artworks, told AFP that confirming the painting was the stolen Van Gogh was "one of the greatest moments of my life." "Arthur Brand, in cooperation with the Dutch police, has solved this matter," Richard Bronswijk of the Dutch police arts crime unit confirmed to AFP.

"This is definitely the real one, there's no doubt about it," Brand told AFP that frequent calls by him and the Dutch police to hand back the stolen artwork finally paid off when a man, whose identity was not revealed for his own safety, handed Brand the painting in a blue IKEA bag, covered with bubble-wrap and stuffed in a pillow casing. A video clip supplied by Brand showed him unpacking the painting in his lounge and gasping in astonishment when he realized what it was. "I couldn't believe it," he said.

'Massive headache'

The painting was burgled from the Singer Laren Museum near Amsterdam on March 30, 2020 in a heist that made headlines around the world. Dutch police released video images shortly after the burglary showing a thief smashing through a glass door in the middle of the night, before running out with the painting tucked under his right arm.

In April 2021, police arrested a man named in Dutch media as Nils M. for the theft. He was later convicted and sentenced to eight years behind bars. M. was also convicted for stealing another masterpiece by Frans Hals called "Two

Laughing Boys" in a separate heist. "After a few months I heard from a source in the criminal world who had bought the Van Gogh," from Nils M, said Brand, who has gained fame for his remarkable recoveries of stolen art, including the "Hitler's Horses" bronze statues, a Picasso painting and a ring that once belonged to Oscar Wilde. This man, identified by Dutch media as Peter Roy K., was currently behind bars for a separate case involving the large-scale import and export of cocaine, Brand said. K. wanted to use the painting as collateral to negotiate a reduction in his sentence.

Brand confirmed Peter Roy K.'s identity, stressing he had said before that "no deal for a reduced sentence would be made." The whereabouts of the Van Gogh however remained unknown until two weeks ago when a mysterious man contacted Brand saying he wanted to return it. After some negotiation, Brand persuaded the man — who had "nothing to do with the theft", according to the art detective — to hand back the artwork. "The man told me 'I want to return the Van Gogh. It has caused a massive headache' because it could not be used as a bargaining chip, Brand said. — AFP



This handout picture released by Dutch art detective Arthur Brand shows a portrait of him posing with the painting titled "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring", painted by Vincent van Gogh in 1884, at his home in Amsterdam. — AFP

Billionaire US collectors to return ancient artefacts to Cambodia

A billionaire family in the United States will return more than 30 looted ancient artefacts to Cambodia after agreeing it "wrongfully possessed" the treasures, the Cambodian government said Wednesday. Years of civil war followed by the genocidal Khmer Rouge rule saw historical sites looted with near-impunity in Cambodia, which is famed for its Angkor Wat temple complex. Many of the pieces are thought to date back to the Khmer Empire, a once-mighty dynasty that sprawled across much of modern-day Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos between the ninth and 15th centuries. A trove of stolen artefacts has been sent back to Cambodia in recent years from Western museums and private collectors.

Now, 33 items from the Lindemann private collection will be "voluntarily" returned to Cambodia, its ministry of arts and culture said Wednesday. The move "sets an excellent and proper example for other museums and private collectors... to follow and return our national treasures," Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Phoung Sackona said.

The government did not say when the items will arrive in Cambodia. They include a reclining Vishnu and Ardhanarishvara sculpture — believed to be from the remote northern ancient city of Koh Ker — which witnesses say was looted in the 1990s, according to the official statement. "Having purchased these items from dealers that we assumed were reputable, we were saddened to learn how they made their way to the market in the United States," The New York Times quoted the Lindemann family as saying in a statement. Last month, the National Gallery of Australia said it will return three sculptures to Cambodia after an investigation found they were likely to have been "illegally exported." — AFP

Lifestyle



A woman looks at clothes in a store of the YOU clothing brand at the shopping center in Moscow.— AFP photos



A woman looks at clothes in a multi-brand clothing store at the shopping center in Moscow.



Clothing consultant Stanislava Nazhmitdinova poses for a photo in a multi-brand clothing store at the shopping center in Moscow.

Despite staff shortages, a lack of equipment and dwindling fabric supplies, Russia's fashion industry is rushing to fill the gap left by the departure of major Western labels. Dozens of brands like Adidas, H&M and Zara have shut up shop in Russia since the conflict in Ukraine began last year, while Western sanctions have cut off access to foreign goods.



An employee works at the garment factory of the YOU clothing brand in Saint Petersburg.

Moscow saw its European clothing imports drop by 37.2 percent last year, according to the Fashion Network site. The Kremlin has cast the sanctions as an opportunity to bolster domestic firms, returning to Soviet-style manufacturing after years of foreign dependence. But while the state has poured subsidies into industries like clothing, Moscow faces an uphill battle to sell customers on the "Made in Russia" label.

Industrial revolution

Nadezhda Samoylenko, who has worked in the sector since 1978, said



'MADE IN RUSSIA' FASHION STRUGGLES TO FILL GAP

that when the Soviet Union collapsed, so too did the country's light manufacturing industry. Russia stopped producing fabrics and lost the knowledge needed to train managers, as the Soviet-era schools that trained staff closed.

Factories are between 25 percent and 50 percent short of the specialists they need as a result, one industry expert told AFP. While Western brands such as H&M and Uniqlo have been superseded by Russian replacements like LIME and "Lady &

Gentleman", most manufacturing still takes place abroad.

"Major Russian clothing brands produce in the same Asian factories as the Western brands that left Russia," said Tatyana Belkevich from RAFI, an association that represents Russia's fashion industry. In Saint Petersburg, the YOU clothing brand has positioned itself as an alternative to Spain's Massimo Dutti, part of the Inditex group that closed more than 500 stores in the wake of Moscow's offensive.

The company does produce in Russia, but volumes remain low. YOU said it doubled its production last year, to 4,000 items. The company is aiming to double this again by 2024, "even though delivery times for raw materials and supplies from Asia have also doubled", CEO Yevgeniya Moseychuk told AFP. The brand has tripled its workforce in 18 months and opened six stores, but it is still a long way from mass production. And it lacks a quarter of the sewing staff it needs.



An employee works at the garment factory of the YOU clothing brand in Saint Petersburg.



An employee works at the garment factory of the YOU clothing brand in Saint Petersburg.

New performing arts center opens at Manhattan 9/11 site

Days after New York marked the 22nd anniversary of the September 11 attacks, it opened a new arts center Wednesday in the last area of Ground Zero that had not yet been redeveloped. New York's state governor, the city's mayor and other local officials came together to open the Perelman Performing Arts Center, a project decades in the making intended to provide a space of healing and celebration of life at the site of the 2001 destruction.

It's the final piece of a project intended for the once-devastated area in Lower Manhattan where reflecting pools indicate an area of memorial, the museum a place of education, and now the arts center for renewal. "I lost my husband, David. And each time I come to the site, my feelings keep changing. At first, a rawness filled with inescapable loss and longing," said Paula Grant Berry, a member of the jury that selected the design for the 9/11 memorial.



New York Governor Kathy Hochul (fourth left), Ron Perelman (fifth L), former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (center) and current Mayor Eric Adams hold a ribbon at the Perelman Performing Arts Center (PAC NYC) opening press event and ribbon cutting ceremony in New York.— AFP

"But now, after more than two decades, and this may sound a little odd, I am also filled with something more hopeful." In the aftermath of the attacks many advocates of building an arts center at the site repeated a line written by the legendary composer Leonard Bernstein, who in the days after John F. Kennedy was assassinated said: "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before."

That line was repeated at Wednesday's ceremony, which featured a performance of Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's definitive ballad "Somewhere from 'West Side Story,'" as well as a "ribbon-connecting" in lieu of a ribbon-cutting, meant to symbolize unity.

The \$500-million, 129,000-square-foot (12,000-square-meter) project at the foot of the World Trade Center received significant funding from the city's former mayor Michael Bloomberg, who contributed \$130,000 to the development funded mostly with private donations. The cube-like building encased in almost 5,000 marble tiles houses three primary theaters, which can be used independently or combined, with 60 different configurations and capacities ranging from 90 to 950 seats.—AFP

Meet the UK influencer who wants curves on the catwalk

Felicity Hayward will not miss a single show at London Fashion Week, which starts on Friday, watching each model and counting the number of plus-size women on the catwalks. For this influencer, so proud of her XXL shape, "beauty doesn't have a size". Hayward's fashion debut came in 2012 when, to her surprise, she was spotted in London by a well-known photographer. She has since fronted multiple advertising campaigns and become known for her work in broadening the representation of women in fashion. The hashtags #selflovebringsbeauty and more recently #includingthecurves proved a hit on social media.

Hayward has also found time to release her book "Does My Butt Look Big in This?: A Body Positive Manifesto", which features a photo of her in a tight leopard-skin dress on the cover. Hayward, who grew up in a village in the east of England, started her work life far from the world of fashion, teaching autistic children. She also worked in a bar in the evening to earn more money and it was there that photographer Miles Aldridge, who was looking for a blonde, curvy woman, approached her.

Having studied his work at university, she seized the opportunity, agreeing to the 20-hour shoot. "When it was published it went viral," explained Hayward. "The photographer had never used plus-size models or a curvy woman in his work, he always used very, very thin women." Things quickly snowballed, with a modeling agency getting in touch. "I thought it was a prank," she said. "I was put into a place where girls and women like me didn't really have a space." Fashion magazine British Vogue published an article about her in July 2013, entitled

"Bringing Back the Bombshell". She has since done advertising campaigns for the cosmetic brand Mac, The Body Shop and made the covers of Glamour and ID, among others.

'Using me' for exposure

Now aged 35, Hayward calls herself an influencer, and it was in this capacity that she was invited to numerous fashion shows. She nevertheless chose to boycott London Fashion Week in 2019.



Model and social media influencer, Felicity Hayward, poses for a portrait following an interview with AFP in London.—AFP

"They were using me to be on the front row... to give the exposure for their brands," she said.

But many of the brands did not produce clothes in her size, so she reasoned: "If you don't do my size with should I support you?" From now on, she only physically goes to the fashion shows of brands offering clothes in her size, which is a US size 16. Instead she follows hundreds of fashion shows in New York, Milan and Paris on the internet, counting the number of curvy models.

New York usually fares best, but she only spotted 31 plus-size models in February's shows, compared with 49 in September 2022, out of a total of around 3,000, according to her estimates. In London, 71 plus-size models hit the catwalk in February, compared with 45 the previous season, while in Paris she counted 40 curvy models. She has vowed to carry on her crusade to make fashion "more inclusive". "Fashion is trend-based, bodies are not," she said.

But the situation is "much better that 10 years ago", she added, and the body positivity trend has well and truly taken hold. But there is a flip side, she warned -- brands will parade one or two plus-size models without offering clothes larger than US size 9. Hayward also took aim at reality TV stars the Kardashians, and the cultural influence they have. "Suddenly waists are tiny, lips are huge, and they're saying that this is all natural," she said, accusing them of creating "a false narrative" about women's bodies. "I despise what they have done to the body image," she added.—AFP

Alleged bodies of 'non-human beings' shown in Mexican Congress

The alleged bodies of two "non-human beings" were presented during a congressional hearing in Mexico, generating a mixture of surprise, disbelief and ridicule on social media on Wednesday. The purported mummified remains were exhibited in two small display cases on Tuesday — the first time the Mexican Congress has officially addressed the issue of possible extraterrestrial life.



Mexican journalist and ufologist Jaime Maussan speaks at the Mexican Congress in Mexico City. — AFP photos

The alleged corpses, which had a grayish color and facial features similar to humans, were brought by Jaime Maussan, a controversial Mexican journalist and researcher who reported finding them in Peru in 2017. "They are non-human beings. We don't want to call them extraterrestrials because we don't know," Maussan said during the session called by ruling party lawmaker Sergio Gutierrez, who defended the event as being in the "public interest."

Maussan cited carbon dating analysis by the National Autonomous University of Mexico that he said showed "these beings are around 1,000 years old." The university's physics institute confirmed in a statement that it had carried out tests but only to determine the age and not the origin of the specimens.

Its laboratory "distances itself from any subsequent use, interpretation or misrepresentation made with the results it issues," a statement said. During the hearing, Gutierrez asked the speakers to swear to tell the truth.

He said Maussan requested the session after a US congressional committee in July was told by a former in-



Alleged bodies of "non-human" beings exhibited at the Mexican Congress in Mexico City. — AFP photos

telligence official that humans were not alone in the universe and American authorities were covering up the evidence. In May, the US space agency NASA held its first public meeting on the issue, and urged a more rigorous scientific approach to clarify the origin of so-called unidentified anomalous

phenomena (UAPs).

The Mexican hearing generated both astonishment and mockery, including jokes accompanied by photos of the alien creature in the movie "E.T." The event "shows the contempt that this country has for science," one user wrote on the social media plat-



form X, formerly called Twitter. Others shared videos of the event with the words "The Martians have arrived," while there was a tongue-in-cheek call for Maussan to be named "president of intergalactic relations." — AFP

France goes (a bit) veggie for Olympics

With France slowly weaning itself off its traditional obsession with meat, the top chefs in charge of feeding the sporting masses at the 2024 Olympic Games are emphasizing a more vegetarian approach. Michelin-starred chef Akrame Benallal serves plenty of steaks, burgers and other meat in his restaurants, but his flagship dish for the Games will be muesli with quinoa. "When there are 40,000 meals per day, I don't want anyone to be let down. I want people who eat kosher to eat with me, people who eat halal, the Christians and Buddhists too," he said.

"It's vegetables that unite everyone," he added. He is one of three award-winning chefs overseeing the French food for the 15,000 athletes of the Olympic Village next summer. Another is Alexandre Mazzia, a former professional basketball player, who is offering recipes based around chickpeas, peas and smoked beetroot, and smoked fish with chard.

They are working with a big food group, Sodexo Live!, that is running the restaurants and has made it a key objective to reduce the carbon footprint of its menu and use less animal protein. It claims that a third of the protein across its 500 dishes will come from vegetables,



French chef Alexandre Mazzia poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP photos

and one of its signature dishes will be a dal of green lentils from the Paris region with skyr (a type of yoghurt), coriander and corn oil. French people on average consume 113 kilos of meat annually — more than most European countries and almost double the global average — according to Our World in Data.

But with the country committed to cutting its meat consumption for environmental reasons, the Olympics could mark a turning point, said food historian Loic Bienassis. "Historically, there are no famous French dishes that don't include meat. To say 'Let's do some French cuisine but cut out the meat' is a major turnaround," he said.



French chef Akrame Benallal poses during a photo session in his restaurant in Paris.

'Can't impose on everyone'

There will still be plenty of meat in the Olympic Village, of course. The last of the three top French chefs is Amandine Chaignot, who has chosen guinea fowl with crayfish as her signature meal. "Clearly, when we think of traditional French cuisine, we think more of 'steak au poivre' than quinoa risotto," she joked.

But vegetables alone cannot meet all the needs of the world's top sportspeople, said Helene DeFrance, a medal-winning sailor and nutritionist who is on the athletes' commission for 2024. "Vegetarianism is a big trend... but it's not something that we can impose on



Amandine Chaignot, one of the three chefs who will cook for the athletes.

everyone," she told AFP. Pulses can be hard to digest and not everyone converts plant proteins effectively, she said.

But as Mazzia points out, their food is more for celebrating after the competition than during the build-up. "I'm interested in everything related to kilocalories and the like, but that's not what I'm here for," he said. "The important thing during the Games is to stop and take a moment to enjoy something totally different. I hope the athletes come to celebrate their medal victories with me." — AFP

NASA to publish long-awaited UFO report

NASA is set to release on Thursday the findings of a long-awaited study on unexplained flying objects in Earth's skies. The US space agency announced last year it was reviewing evidence regarding unidentified anomalous phenomena, or UAPs — which has replaced the term "UFO" in official parlance. The subject has long fascinated the public but was shunned by mainstream science.

An independent team of 16 researchers shared their preliminary observations in May, finding that existing data and eyewitness reports are insufficient to draw firm conclusions, while calling for more systematic collection of high-quality data. It's unlikely Thursday's report will change that bottom line — but it could eventually usher in the start of a new mission for the agency.



While NASA's probes and rovers scour the solar system for any fossils of ancient microbes, and its astronomers look for signs of intelligent civilizations on distant planets, its historic posture has been to "debunk" sightings on our home planet. There have been more than 800 "events" collected over 27 years, of which two to five percent are thought to be possibly anomalous, the report's authors said during the May meeting.

These are defined as "anything that is not readily understandable by the operator or the sensor," or "something that is doing something weird," said team member Nadia Drake. The US government has begun taking the issue of UAPs more seriously in recent years, in part due to concerns that they are related to foreign surveillance.

NASA's work, which relies on unclassified material, is separate from a Pentagon investigation, though the two are coordinating on matters of how to apply scientific tools and methods. In July, a former US intelligence officer made headlines when he told a congressional committee he "absolutely" believes the government is in possession of unidentified anomalous phenomena — as well as remains of their alien operators.

"My testimony is based on information I've been given by individuals with a longstanding track record of legitimacy and service to this country — many of whom also shared compelling evidence in the form of photography, official documentation and classified oral testimony," David Grusch told lawmakers. Earlier this week, the alleged bodies of two "non-human" beings were presented during a congressional hearing in Mexico, generating a mixture of surprise, disbelief and ridicule on social media.

The purported mummified remains, which had a grayish color and a human-like body form, were brought by Jaime Maussan, a controversial Mexican journalist and researcher who reported finding them in Peru in 2017. — AFP

At Toronto film festival, prestige TV also makes its mark

When Ron Leshem, executive producer of the Emmy-winning television series "Euphoria," was deciding where to premiere his new project, gritty Israeli juvenile prison drama "Bad Boy," he set his sights on the Toronto film festival. "Usually we would go to a TV festival. But with this, we felt that this is a cinematic creation and it needs a film festival," Leshem told AFP in an interview.

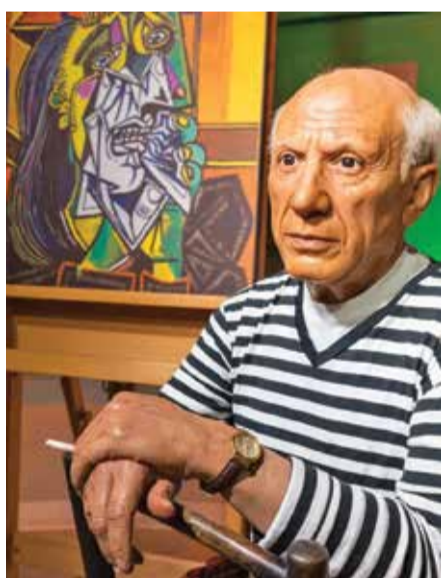
He and "Bad Boy" co-creator Hagar Ben-Asher were not alone: the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), which has served as a launchpad for numerous Oscar-winning movies, is now also a springboard for prestige television, with an A-list lineup in 2023. Netflix unveiled the first episode of its hotly anticipated limited series "All the Light We Cannot See," a World War II epic based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Anthony Doerr and starring three-time Oscar nominee Mark Ruffalo.

Amazon's Prime Video also came to town with "Expats," a drama set in Hong Kong that explores the intertwined lives of rich and poor expatriates in the city, starring Academy Award winner Nicole Kidman. For TIFF CEO Cameron Bailey, the festival's expanded prime-time programming is the result of "the growth of series and the real integration between the people who are making series and the people who are making theatrical films." "They're often the same writers, directors, producers, actors. It just makes sense to dig deeper into that world," Bailey told AFP. — AFP

Picasso masterpiece to fetch \$120m in November auction: Sotheby's

The November auction of a Pablo Picasso masterpiece, the late Spanish painter's "Femme a la montre" from 1932, is expected to fetch at least \$120 million, Sotheby's announced Wednesday. The painting, which depicts Picasso's mistress wearing a watch, will be sold as part of a two-day auction of late New Yorker Emily Fisher Landau's prestigious collection. Other works up for sale include pieces by Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko and Andy Warhol.

Fisher Landau, a longtime board member of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and a renowned art patron and collector, passed away in March at age 102. Sotheby's said in a statement that around 120 pieces from her collection would be for sale and "estimated to bring well over \$400 million" in total, with "Femme a la



montre" making up a significant portion.

Julian Dawes, head of the Sotheby's Impressionist and Modern Art division, called the Picasso painting "a masterpiece by every measure." "It is full of joyful, passionate abandon yet at the same time it is utterly considered and resolved," said Dawes, noting its creation in 1932 was part of Picasso's "annus mirabilis," or miracle year. The year 1932

Notre-Dame rebuild chief says spire to rise over Paris Olympics

The spire of Paris' Notre-Dame cathedral, which toppled in a devastating 2019 fire, will rise again before next year's summer Olympics in the French capital, the new chief of the mammoth reconstruction project said Thursday. Notre-Dame's world-famous "silhouette has completely changed since the fire. I hope that by the Olympic Games we will have the great roof of the cathedral and the spire above it back," said Philippe Jost, who took over from General Jean-Louis Georgelin after his death in an accident last month.

The opening ceremony of the Paris games is set to take place on the waters of the River Seine, which flows through the city centre and around the Ile-de-la-Cite, the island site of Notre-Dame. "At that moment, everyone will see that we're really very close to the reopening

was so important in Picasso's work that an entire exhibition was devoted to it in 2018 at London's Tate Modern museum.

Marie-Therese Walter (1909-1977) was Picasso's "golden muse" who would go on to be featured in "many of his most accomplished portraits," Sotheby's said. The lovers met in Paris in 1927, when the Spaniard was still married to Russian-Ukrainian ballet dancer Olga Khokhlova, and while Walter was 17.

Walter, whose daughter with Picasso passed away last year, was also featured in "Femme assise pres d'une fenetre (Marie-Therese)," which sold in 2021 for \$103.4 million by Christie's auction house. Fifty years after his death in 1973 at age 91, Picasso remains one of the most influential artists of the modern world, often hailed as a dynamic and creative genius.

But in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the reputation of this workaholic with a vast output of paintings, sketches and sculpture has been tarnished by accusations he exerted a violent hold over the women who shared his life and inspired his art. — AFP

a few months later," added Jost, who was formerly Georgelin's right-hand man on the rebuild.

He told broadcaster Franceinfo that the general's death in a mountain hiking accident "could have" slowed work but "in fact we're really determined to keep up his efforts. We owe it to many people, but we also owe it to him".

Towering 100 meters above ground level, the wooden spire will already be visible from the end of this year, Jost said, gradually emerging from scaffolding as its roofing is attached. Inside the cathedral "there's still scaffolding but you are struck by its brilliance when you enter," he added, saying that restoration and cleaning work were "pretty much completed by now". — AFP



Newly appointed Deputy Managing Director of the "Rebatir Notre-Dame de Paris" public establishment, Philippe Jost. — AFP

Sports

Top-seeded Jabeur sent packing in San Diego as Garcia advances

Potapova, ranked 27th, overpowers world No 7 Jabeur



KUWAIT: President of the Asian Shooting Confederation Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah received a congratulations cable from HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of his winning the presidency of ASC for the next four years. Sheikh Salman thanked HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, HH the Prime Minister and the council of minister for supporting shooting sport.

Stokes' England ODI record 182 sets up rout of NZ

LONDON: Ben Stokes struck the highest score by an England batsman in a one-day international on Wednesday, his 182 setting up a thrashing of New Zealand at The Oval as he sent a warning to the champions' World Cup rivals just weeks before they begin the defense of their 50-over title in India. Stokes's stunning innings was just slightly more than England's colossal 181-run margin of victory that put them 2-1 up in a four-match series ahead of Friday's finale at Lord's. England were struggling at 13-2 after Trent Boult's early double strike, which included Jonny Bairstow's exit off the first ball of the match.

But Stokes and Dawid Malan (96) hit back with a third-wicket stand of 199 as England recovered to 368 all out. New Zealand's Glenn Phillips kept England at bay with 72 but when he was lbw to spinner Liam Livingstone, the Black Caps were all but beaten at 173-8. Livingstone (3-16) ended the match with 11 overs to spare when he had No 11 Ben Lister stumped by England captain Jos Buttler as New Zealand were dismissed for 187. "Coming back into the team after a while out, it's nice to come back and help the team," said player-of-the-match Stokes at the presentation ceremony.

'Amazing'

Buttler hailed Stokes's innings by saying: "He's played a few good ones, but that was amazing." Boult kept New Zealand in the game with an impressive 5-51 in 9.1 overs, although England were set for a huge total at 348-5 when Stokes was dismissed. But they lost their last five wickets for 20 runs, left-arm quick Boult wrapping up the innings with 11 balls to spare. England, however, had more than enough runs.

Chris Woakes (3-31) did the bulk of the damage as New Zealand — without regular skipper Kane Williamson while the star batsman completes a pre-World Cup recovery from a knee injury — slumped to 37-4, with Reece Topley in the wickets as well. England begin their quest to retain their 50-over global title defense against New Zealand — the team they defeated in a dramatic 2019 'Super Over' World Cup final at Lord's — in Ahmedabad on October 5. And New Zealand coach Gary Stead said: "I don't mind Ben Stokes. I'd rather he scored them (runs) now than on October 5."

Stead took some comfort from the form of Boult, back in New Zealand's ODI set-up this series for the first time in 12 months after turning down a central contract to play in Australia's lucrative Big Bash League. "It's great to have Trent back," said Stead. "In two games he's showed his ability as a world-class player to knock the top off England. It's just a pity we haven't capitalized on those starts." Earlier, the 34-year-old Boult had Bairstow caught at deep backward square before inducing Joe Root to inside-edge onto his stumps.

But Stokes hit back in remarkable fashion with a 124-ball innings, including 15 fours and nine sixes, that surpassed Jason Roy's previous England record of 180 against Australia at Melbourne in 2018. One worrying sign for England, however, was the familiar sight of Stokes, whose previous ODI top score was 102 not out, grimacing in pain thanks to a chronic knee problem he hopes to manage all the way through the World Cup. But Stokes, off the field at the start of New Zealand's chase, said: "I just needed a little bit of treatment... It (the knee injury) is getting better and better."

Boult again troubled an England top-order once more missing Roy after the opener suffered a fresh back spasm. But Malan, who missed England's 79-run win in Southampton on Sunday to attend the birth of his son, responded with a 52-ball fifty as he looked to cement his place in a 15-man World Cup squad. Malan, fell just shy of what would have been his fifth hundred in 20 ODIs when he got a faint edge to wicketkeeper Tom Latham. But Stokes, in a dynamic display of shot-making, broke Roy's record in style with a six off Lister, only to hole out off the paceman two balls later. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Anastasia Potapova surprised top-seeded Ons Jabeur of Tunisia to reach the quarter-finals of the WTA San Diego Open on Wednesday as second-seeded Caroline Garcia made it safely through. Potapova, ranked 27th in the world, said patience was the key to her 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over world number seven Jabeur, who reached her third Grand Slam final at Wimbledon this year. "Ons is very tough to play," said Potapova, who had edged Alycia Parks in three sets in the first round as Jabeur enjoyed a first-round bye.

"She is truly one of the best in the world and with her style it's very uncomfortable. She likes to mix it up a lot, and actually I'm really proud of myself today that I was able to stay calm, focused and just do what I've got to do." Jabeur was coming off a fourth-round showing at the US Open, where she battled illness in the opening rounds.

Potapova notched her sixth career victory over a top-10 player and lined up a quarter-final meeting with 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin, a 1-6, 6-4, 6-2 winner over fellow American Katie Volynets. Potapova converted six of her 11 break chances, breaking the Tunisian at love to seal the opening set. Jabeur served for the second set at 6-5 but was broken, Potapova racing to a 4-0 lead in the tiebreaker before Jabeur bore down to knot it at 4-4. Jabeur's ninth double fault of the match gave Potapova a double match point, and Jabeur fired wide with a forehand to end it.

France's Garcia served up eight aces in her 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 victory over former US Open champion Sloane Stephens, avenging a loss to the American last month in Cincinnati, where Stephens



CALIFORNIA: Ons Jabeur of Tunisia serves against Anastasia Potapova in the first set at the Cymbiotika San Diego Open at Barnes Tennis Center on September 13, 2023 in San Diego. — AFP

ended the French player's title defense in the second round. Garcia next faces American Danielle Collins, who beat Latvian Jelena Ostapenko 2-6, 6-3, 6-4. Third-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece

also reached the quarter-finals, moving through when Camila Osorio of Colombia retired from their match with a right thigh injury while trailing 6-3, 2-2. — AFP

Kuwait Artistic Gymnastics team in Doha

KUWAIT: Kuwait Artistic Gymnastics National Team for Juniors and Clubs categories will have a friendly competition with their Qatari counterparts in Doha on Friday in preparation for the upcoming events. The delegation is headed by technical director at the Gymnastics federation Mohammad Behbehani with 12 players. This meeting is a good opportunity for Kuwaiti players to get in touch with Qatari players who possess exceptional technical abilities. Kuwait Gymnastics Federation is seeking to test players' abilities and prepare them in the best way possible.



NBA team owners toughen rules on resting star players

NEW YORK: NBA team owners approved on Wednesday tougher rules and larger punishments regarding resting star players, including regulations on multiple All-Stars sitting out regular-season contests, the league announced. LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers and Kawhi Leonard of the Los Angeles Clippers are among those who have been strategically rested during prior seasons by their clubs. The league defines a star player as anyone who has been on an NBA All-Star or All-NBA squad over the three previous seasons, or after an All-Star Game in the same season.

Restricting rest for star players during in-season tournament and nationally televised games is a boost for NBA telecast partners as they prepare to negotiate new media rights deals, ensuring games expected to have big name talent are not undercut

by stars sitting out. The Player Participation Policy vote gives the league office more oversight and power to punish violators, according to ESPN and The Athletic, with fines of \$100,000 for a first violation, \$250,000 for a second and each addition fine costing \$1 million more.

Under the new rules, recommended by the NBA competition committee, teams cannot shut down a star player or have him play a greatly reduced role in a manner impacting the integrity of the game. A league integrity concern could be that teams might rest top talent knowing that late-season losses by a team out of playoff contention could improve position in the NBA Draft. Independent league office investigations, including medical reviews, will be part of enforcing the resting policies when teams do not demonstrate an approved reason for a star player to be absent.

Teams are given the responsibility to manage rosters so no more than one star player is unavailable for a contest and must ensure stars are available for national telecast games as well as the new in-season tournament starting in November. Healthy players resting for a game must be visible to spectators and at games. Teams must balance



LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers

the number of single-game absences of star players between home and road games. The league said there are exceptions to the participation policy for personal reasons, injuries and pre-approved absences based upon a player's age, career workload or serious injury history. — AFP

Verstappen winning streak under threat

SINGAPORE: Max Verstappen's bid for a record-extending 11th straight win faces a severe test in Sunday's "perilous" Singapore night race on the unpredictable Marina Bay street circuit. The Red Bull driver's third world title in a row is only a matter of time but the Dutchman has never triumphed under the lights in Singapore, where tropical storms, intense humidity and concrete barriers all await. Safety cars and red flags will almost certainly play a part too, with memories of an "incredibly messy" race in Singapore a year ago fresh in Verstappen's mind. Rain is again forecast for race weekend.

Verstappen was only eighth on the grid in 2022 after being under-fueled in Saturday qualifying and a pre-race deluge saw him start poorly on the sodden track, dropping back five places. He clawed his way through the field with the help of several safety cars and virtual safety car periods, only to slither on to an escape road while trying to take fourth place, eventually rejoining and settling for seventh. Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez kept his cool out in front to win ahead of Charles Leclerc in a Ferrari and keep the champagne on ice for a bit longer. "It's better than eighth but it's not what I'm here for, not with a car like that," lamented Verstappen after the race. "It was just incredibly messy."

Verstappen leads Perez by 145 points in this year's championship and could clinch the world title with six races to spare at next week's Japanese Grand Prix. Mercedes are second in the constructors' championship, a distant 310 points behind, with team boss Toto Wolff believing that Red Bull are on course to win all 22 races this season. "I think they



SINGAPORE: Mechanics work on the car of Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen ahead of the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix night race at the Marina Bay Street Circuit in Singapore on September 14, 2023. — AFP

need to screw it up themselves," Wolff said after Verstappen's 10th win in a row at Monza a fortnight ago made it 14 out of 14 for Red Bull in 2023.

'One of the toughest'

If they complete the clean sweep, Red Bull would eclipse the record of Mercedes in 2016 when Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton won 19 of 21 races. Red Bull team principal Christian Horner warned that the unique Marina Bay challenge could upset their perfect season. "It's a street circuit, it's one of the toughest on the calendar. We saw last year how perilous it can be," said Horner. "We'll just do our best to keep this momentum running. "One day we're going to get

beaten. It's just a question of when, and we've just got to make the when as far away as we can. "I think with every weekend that goes past there's more expectation to keep up this amazing run of results."

Singapore lap times will be quicker this year because of construction work near the city-centre circuit which has meant the removal of four 90-degree corners towards the end of the lap. The total number of corners has dropped from 22 to 19 with lap times around eight seconds faster. That will add a new element of uncertainty — team strategists will have less time to make calls on whether to pit for new tyres during the safety-car periods that frequent the Singapore race. — AFP

Sports

IOC urged to ban Iran

Tehran accused of discriminating against women in sport

PARIS: A group including former Franco-Iranian boxing world champion Mahyar Monshipour and Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi has asked the International Olympic Committee to ban Iran from the Paris Olympics. The letter, sent to the IOC at the end of July, said that Iran violates the principle of non-discrimination in sport by failing to comply with the Olympic Charter, which

states that "the practice of sport is a human right", lawyer Frederic Thiriez told a press conference.

Thiriez said the charter also specifies that there must be "no discrimination of any kind, in particular on the grounds of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Thiriez said he was

"working on a referral to the Court of Arbitration for Sport" and a petition. The letter draws a parallel with the exclusion of South Africa in 1970.

Thiriez said that the IOC had replied "rest assured, we are closely monitoring the situation in Iran". The group would, at the very least, like Iranian athletes banned from next year's Olympics in disciplines that are forbidden to wom-

en: wrestling, boxing, swimming, sailing, and so on. "We dream of practicing our sport normally", former wrestler Shirin Shirzad, a refugee in the Netherlands, said by videoconference.

In Iran, women practise "in flats or basements", said Monshipour. Last month, two associations lodged a complaint in Paris against Ghafoor Kargari, the Iranian president of the 2024 Nation-

al Paralympic Committee, who was visiting France at the time, accusing him of torture and crimes against humanity. The death, in September 2022, of the young Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini, after she was arrested by the morality police for failing to comply with strict Islamic dress regulations, sparked months of demonstrations, which were put down in bloodshed and arrests. — AFP

McIlroy hails 'incredible' Aberg; Ryder Cup looms

LONDON: Rory McIlroy says he is at the front of the Ludvig Aberg "bandwagon" as the rising star prepares to make his Ryder Cup debut later this month. Aberg was hailed as a generational talent by Europe captain Luke Donald after he gave the 23-year-old Swede one of his six wild cards for the upcoming contest against the United States. The former world number one amateur only turned professional in June but won the final qualifying event in Switzerland and will make the quickest transition from the amateur ranks to the Ryder Cup in the contest's history.

Four-time major winner McIlroy, in the field for this week's BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth, said he had played alongside Aberg in practice at the Ryder Cup venue, near Rome, this week. World number two McIlroy teamed up with Tommy Fleetwood, losing to Aberg and Viktor Hovland. "I had an opportunity to play with Ludvig for the first time on Monday, which I was excited about," he said. "I told him I've been looking forward to this for a while." Asked if Aberg had lived up to his expectations, McIlroy added: "Probably exceeded them. Everyone talks about what a great driver of the golf ball he is, which he is.

"The ball-striking is incredible. But I was really impressed with his wedge play and how he can sort of control his trajectory with shorter clubs. I



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland

was on the bandwagon before and I'm certainly at the front of it now." McIlroy partnered Shane Lowry and Ian Poulter, twice, in the last Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits in 2021, but lost all three matches. He beat Xander Schauffele in the opening singles on the final day but Europe crashed to a humiliating 19-9 defeat.

The 34-year-old, who was left out of a session for the first time since making his debut in 2010,

talked of the pain of the defeat. "We're not used to playing for other people in this game, and you go out there and you're playing for your team-mates, you want to do well for them," he said. "I felt like I didn't do that and I felt like I didn't give a good account of myself and that stung and the scoreline stung." The Ryder Cup takes place at the Marco Simone Golf and Country Club from September 29 to October 1. — AFP

I shall rise yet again: NFL's 'heartbroken' Rodgers vows

NEW YORK: New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers said Wednesday he is "heartbroken" after suffering a season-ending injury four plays into the NFL campaign but vowed, "I shall rise yet again." Four-time NFL Most Valuable Player Rodgers made the remarks on Instagram in his first public comments since suffering a torn left Achilles tendon in the opening minutes of New York's 22-16 home victory over Buffalo on Monday.

The 39-year-old superstar had been the off-season focus of the NFL after spending 18 seasons with the Green Bay Packers and being traded in April to the Jets, where he was seen as the last player needed to make New York a title contender. His much-anticipated Jets debut drew huge attention but ended on his fourth play from scrimmage when he was sacked by Buffalo's Leonard Floyd. Rodgers was helped off the field, carted to the locker room and wore a walking boot as he limped inside.

Two days later, Rodgers posted a message on Instagram beside a photo of him running onto the field on Monday carrying an American flag. "I'm completely heartbroken and moving through all of the emotions, but deeply touched and humbled by the support and love," Rodgers wrote. "Please keep

me in your thoughts and prayers as I begin the healing process today. "The night is darkest before the dawn. And I shall rise yet again."

It was the firmest indication so far that his legendary career as one of the NFL's all-time top passers is not yet over. Rodgers concluded his message with, "Proud of my guys, 1-0," with an emoji of a plane. His comments came only hours after Jets coach Robert Saleh said he wasn't buying into speculation that Rodgers might retire, even though it will mean extensive rehabilitation work for a player who turns 40 in December to rewrite his American football farewell.

"I would be shocked if this is the way he is going to go out," Saleh said Wednesday. "But at the same time... he's working through a whole lot of headspace things he needs to deal with and that will be the last thing I talk to him about." Rodgers, signed with the Jets through the 2025 campaign, will remain as an advisor to the Jets this season, Saleh hopes, and serve as a mentor to Zach Wilson, the quarterback the Jets benched to bring Rodgers into a starter's role. "I think it's very important," Saleh said of Rodgers staying close to the Jets. "I think it's important for him. Mental health and healing, I think that's very important."

An important presence

The impact of a Super Bowl champion can only help motivate players on a team with the longest playoff drought in North American major sports, last reaching the post-season in the 2010 campaign, and a club whose only Super Bowl victory came in 1969.



Quarterback Aaron Rodgers

"His presence, his words... he's as much a football coach as he is a player, and just having his presence, his thoughts, his words and his leadership, I think anyone would want that," Saleh said. Saleh moved up Tim Boyle from the practice squad to back up Wilson as the Jets prepare to face Dallas on Sunday. Thus far, they are the only healthy signal callers who know the offensive system installed this year for Rodgers. "Zach and Tim, those are our guys," Saleh said. "Right now, all of our attention is on Zach and Tim to get them ready." — AFP

Spain women's league players call off strike

BARCELONA: Footballers from Spain's women's top flight, Liga F, have called off a strike which postponed the first week of fixtures after an agreement over wages was reached, unions and the league said Thursday. "Liga F and the unions have reached an agreement regarding the minimum wage that allows the strike to be called off," said Liga F in a statement. Five unions, includ-

ing AFE and Futpro, called a strike covering the first two rounds of fixtures last week. "The deal is in regard to the minimum wage, the main cause of the strike — accepted by the players as an act of responsibility to the fans of the sport," said the unions in a statement.

Liga F has agreed to raise the minimum wage from 16,000 euros (\$17,000) a year to 21,000 euros (\$22,500) in the current season, rising to 23,500 euros (\$25,500) by the 2025-26 campaign. Players were asking for a minimum wage starting at 23,000 euros from this season onwards. However despite the strike being called off, the unions said there were various other issues

on which agreements have not been reached after a year of negotiations.

"This step is the beginning and only a part of the agreement — now it is time to work to move forward on important points such as maternity, harassment protocol (and other aspects)," the unions added. Matches will now take place this weekend after the games on September 8-10 were not played. Last season a refereeing strike disrupted the first week of Liga F matches. Eventually, the league agreed to pay referees higher match fees, while the Spanish government said they would contribute to a refereeing retirement fund.

Spanish women's football has been in the spotlight after La Roja

won the World Cup in August, but the victory was tainted by an incident involving former federation president Luis Rubiales at the medal ceremony after the game. Rubiales, 46, sparked worldwide outrage when he forcibly kissed Spain midfielder Jenni Hermoso on the lips. The chief has since resigned and is set to appear in court on Friday after a Spanish judge opened an investigation into the incident. Currently, 81 Spain players are striking against the women's national team, until the leadership of the federation changes. Rubiales has resigned and controversial women's coach Jorge Vilda was sacked. — AFP

NFL adds global player to all practice squads

NEW YORK: All 32 NFL teams will have one extra practice squad position for an international player starting next year in a bid to boost opportunities for global talent, the league announced Wednesday. Since 2017, select divisions had been allocated players from outside the United States as part of the NFL's International Player Pathway (IPP) program and 37 global players have signed with NFL clubs.

"The game grows and improves with global talent from around the world who inspire the next generation in their home nation," NFL executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent said. Four players from the IPP program are on active NFL rosters, including Australia offensive tackle Jordan Mailata of Philadelphia, German running back Jakob Johnson of Las Vegas and Washington's Nigerian-born British defensive end Efe Obada and German defensive tackle David Bada.

"The IPP program changed my life and I'm very thankful for the opportunity it has provided me," Mailata said. "The program shows so many young athletes around the world that playing in the NFL can be a reality." Expanding the program to see all 32 teams able to sign an international player to their practice squad will only continue to help make our sport better, more diverse and more competitive."

Starting next year, all NFL practice squads can have a 17th player if the extra player is someone whose residence and citizenship are outside Canada or the United States and who has no more than two years of US high school experience. "The practice squad roster expansion for international players will further contribute to our goal of building a sustainable pathway to the NFL for elite global athletes, while also creating local connections with fans around the world," said Peter O'Reilly, NFL executive vice president for club business, major events and international.

Clubs can elevate an international practice squad player to the active roster a maximum of three times in a season. "As interest and participation in our game continues to grow and thrive globally, the talent pool of players who have the potential to impact our game on and off the field keeps expanding as well," said Tampa Bay Buccaneers owner Joel Glazer, chair of the NFL International Committee and part of the English Premier League's Manchester United ownership group.

"The opportunity for all 32 clubs to utilize an additional practice squad roster spot for an international player is a significant step forward in helping to identify, develop and enable more exciting talent from around the world to play in the NFL. "Our clubs will embrace this new opportunity to develop the pipeline of international players as we grow our game." — AFP



Fullback Jakob Johnson

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Hospitals

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

Physiotherapy Hospital

24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507

Abdullah Salem

Nuzha
Industrial Shuwaikh
Qadsiya
Dasmah
Bneid Al-Gar
Shaab
Qibla
Ayoun Al-Qibla
Mirqab
Sharq
Salmiya

22549134
22526804
24814764
22515088
22532265
22531908
22518752
22459381
22451082
22456536
22465401
25746401

Change of Name

I, **Dhawani Hiteshkumar** holder of Indian Passport No. M5455684 having permanent address - Gujarat, India Pin 392001, residing in Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Dhawani Hiteshkumar and (surname) Talati. (#4227) 13/9/2023

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Canada kick off Davis Cup defense in style

Ram lifts USA against Croatia



VALENCIA: Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (right) and Marcel Granollers-Pujol play against Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik and Adam Pavlasek during the group stage men's doubles match between Spain and Czech Republic of the Davis Cup tennis tournament. — AFP

PARIS: Canada opened their title defense by downing Italy as Great Britain upset Australia on the second day of Davis Cup final group stage action on Wednesday. The Czech Republic won their tie against a Spain side sorely missing world number two Carlos Alcaraz, while US Open men's doubles champion Rajeev Ram helped the United States team battle past Croatia. The top two from each of the 16-team four group round robin will move into the knockout phase in Spain in November.

Canada stayed on course for the grand finale in Malaga next month courtesy of straight set wins in the opening singles by Alexis Galarneau and then Gabriel Diallo. Galarneau and Vasek Pospisil then claimed a tense 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) win over Matteo Arnaldi and Simone Bolelli to defeat the Italians 3-0 in Bologna.

Canada are trying to become the first nation in

a decade to win the tournament back-to-back. The last country to achieve the feat, the Czech Republic in 2012-2013, exploited the absence of Alcaraz in Valencia to beat Spain 3-0 and join Serbia at the top of Group C. Over in Manchester the Great Britain captain Leon Smith's gamble in opting to select Jack Draper and Dan Evans in preference to his highest-ranked team member Cameron Norrie or experienced veteran Andy Murray as his singles players paid off handsomely.

Davis Cup debutant Draper, who made it through to the US Open fourth round, repaid Smith's faith in him with a 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) win over Thanasi Kokkinakis. In front of a 9,000 crowd Draper broke Kokkinakis when his Australian rival was serving for the match, and then fired a final backhand winner down the line to clinch the deciding tie break after almost three hours play

to get the hosts off to a dream start. Evans then got the better of world number 12 Alex de Minaur 6-1, 2-6, 6-4 to sink last year's finalists. Last year's runners-up Australia took the doubles to leave the home side 2-1 winners, with the 2015 champions second to France, who beat Switzerland 24 hours earlier, in Group B. Draper was buzzing from his first taste of Davis Cup competition. "There's nothing better. It was a real battle, massive crowd in here," he said on court.

Tiafoe toppled

"It's amazing to play my first Davis Cup tie in the UK in this sort of arena. I'm just so happy to be here and grateful Leon trusted me and put me out here today." He added: "I knew I'd played some tough matches at the US Open and I felt really good about my tennis. That helped the nerves a lot. "When I got

out there with the home crowd and all those people supporting me, it felt amazing. I haven't played too many great matches this season but I think that was one of them." The United States had to dig deep in Split to overcome hosts Croatia 2-1.

Mackenzie McDonald got the record 32-time winners off to a positive start with a 6-4, 6-2 win over 18-year-old Dino Prizmic. Borna Gojo then leveled the tie by toppling US Open quarter-finalist Frances Tiafoe (USA) 6-4, 7-6 (8/6). That left everything resting on the fate of the closing doubles, with Ram, fresh from his third straight title at Flushing Meadows, linking up with Austin Krajicek to see off Ivan Dodig and Mate Pavic 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 6-2. On Thursday Canada face Sweden, the Czech Republic take on South Korea, France play Australia and the USA come up against the Netherlands. — AFP

Kuwait grabs 10 medals

BEIRUT: Kuwait on Wednesday added 10 more medals, including a gold, to their tally as the Beirut Open Taekwondo championship came to an end. Hailing the national side's performance during the contest, Kuwaiti delegation chief Faisal Al-Rashidi expressed his confidence that "tomorrow's champions" have been born, saying the sport has reached new heights at home. Overwhelmed with the "exemplary" results his athletes have achieved, head coach Waleed Al-Mershad said the future appears bright for Kuwaiti Taekwondo athletes. The two-day contest preceded the Asian Taekwondo championship, both of which featured Kuwaiti athletes. — KUNA



Osama Al-Mutairi



Members of Kuwait Taekwondo team with coaches

Verratti leaves PSG for Qatar's Al Arabi

PARIS: Italian international Marco Verratti has signed for Qatari club Al Arabi, his new club and his former team, Paris Saint-Germain, announced on Wednesday. Al Arabi posted a video on social media showing the midfielder in club colors. Qatari-owned PSG released a statement thanking Verratti for his 11 years at the club. Verratti "played a major role in our great history", said club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi. "Paris, the club and its supporters will always have a very special place in my heart. I will always be a Parisian," it quoted Verratti as saying.

Verratti, 30, has struggled with injuries. He also has a spotty disciplinary record, collecting 141 yellow

cards and six reds for PSG. Bans and injuries limited him to 29 Ligue 1 appearances last season, but that total was the most since he played 32 games in 2014-15. New coach Luis Enrique had not selected Verratti this season. PSG received no concrete offers from any of Europe's big clubs for Verratti, perhaps put off by his salary.

French media reported that the transfer that should bring PSG close to 50 million euros (53.7 million dollars). Verratti won nine French league titles and the French Cup six times with PSG and the European Championship in 2021 with Italy. After a summer in which the Saudi Arabian League continued to attract big-name players, including Verratti's former PSG team-mate Neymar who joined Al Hilal in Riyadh, the Italian is the second star to move to Qatar in less than a week. Brazilian forward Philippe Coutinho joined Al Duhail on a season-long loan from Aston Villa on Friday. — AFP

Balogun on target as USA beat Oman 4-0

MIAMI: The United States beat Oman 4-0 in an international friendly in St Paul, Minnesota on Tuesday with striker Folarin Balogun grabbing his second goal since switching national allegiances. Monaco forward Balogun, who switched from England in May and scored in the Nations League final against Canada a month later, opened the scoring in the 13th minute.

A fierce strike by teammate Sergino Dest was parried out by Oman keeper Ibrahim Al Mukhaini, and Balogun reacted swiftly to bury the loose ball. The USA had been far from impressive in their 3-0 win over Uzbekistan on Saturday but looked sharper and they doubled their lead on the hour through Brenden Aaronson.

The midfielder, who plays in Germany for Union Ber-

lin, drilled a free-kick through a badly organized Oman wall and past the unsighted Al Mukhaini to make it 2-0. Aaronson went close to add another with a fine solo run and low shot which the Oman keeper did well to get down to but the third goal arrived soon enough with Ricardo Pepi who found the target for the second straight game. DeJuan Jones broke down the right and found Pepi with a low ball into the box which the striker collected before spinning sharply and firing into the bottom corner.

The fourth goal came via two players USA coach Gregg Berhalter had brought on to make their debuts—Benjamin Cremaschi found Kevin Parades down the right and his low cross was turned into his own net by the sliding Oman defender Khalid Al-Braiki. "I saw a young side, a lot of young players coming through so, overall, I'm really happy with what I have seen, a really good opportunity to take things forward into October," said US Soccer technical director Matt Crocker. Berhalter's side will face Germany on October 14 in East Hartford and then take on Ghana three days later in Nashville. —AFP