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Crown Prince's visit to China to further boost bilateral ties

Sheikh Mishal to meet Xi, attend opening of Asian Games



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will head to China on Wednesday on an invitation by President Xi Jinping aimed at bolstering bilateral relations and broadening further the already substantial cooperation between Kuwait and Beijing. HH the Crown Prince will also attend the opening of the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou.

Kuwait was the first Gulf state to establish full-scale diplomatic relations with China in 1971. The strategic Kuwait-China relationship has been evolving, serving aspirations of the two countries, namely with respect to development schemes. More-

over, Kuwait was the first Arab state to ink a memorandum of understanding with China for involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The New Kuwait 2035 development strategy has given further impetus for the country's drive to cement ties with China, with the prime goals of overhauling the Kuwaiti economy to render it diversified and sustainable; thus largely becoming in harmony with the Chinese economic strategy.

Development of Kuwaiti-Chinese relations witnessed a major leap in 2018, when the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the Asian nation,

adding to the significance of the political and economic partnership between the two countries. The diplomatic efforts led to concrete outcome, particularly when volume of the Kuwait-China trade exchanges soared to \$31.48 billion in 2022. Kuwait is the seventh largest exporter of crude oil to China, and there are more than 60 Chinese companies in Kuwait, contributing to 80 key projects.

The Gulf state highly values China's stand with Kuwait in the face of the 1990 Iraqi aggression and role of Chinese firemen in putting out flames at oil wells set ablaze by the occupiers before they withdrew from the country. In May 2020, amid

the coronavirus pandemic, a Chinese medical team came to Kuwait to furnish Kuwaiti authorities with Beijing's expertise in coping with the pandemic. In March 2020, the Kuwaiti government donated \$3 million to China to assist Beijing in the efforts against the virus.

At the educational level, China grants academic scholarships to Kuwaiti students and sends Chinese students to the country to study the Arabic language. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in Beijing regularly holds iftar meals during the fasting month of Ramadan and distributes food parcels to the needy. — KUNA

Canada, India spar over killing of Sikh leader

OTTAWA/NEW DELHI: India on Tuesday rejected the "absurd" allegation that its agents were behind the killing of a Sikh leader in Canada, after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's bombshell accusation sent already sour diplomatic relations to a new low. Ottawa also expelled a diplomat it described as the head of India's foreign intelligence service in Canada, prompting a tit-for-tat order from New Delhi for a Canadian diplomat to leave.

Trudeau said Monday that "credible allegations" linked Indian agents to the June slaying of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was accused by New Delhi of carrying out terrorist attacks in India — a charge he denied before his death. New Delhi insisted it had nothing to do with the killing, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "completely rejected" the accusation when earlier raised privately by Trudeau. "Allegations of Government of India's involvement in any act of violence in Canada are absurd," the foreign ministry said in a statement. "We are a democratic polity with a strong commitment to rule of law."

"India needs to take this matter with the utmost seriousness. We are doing that, we are not looking to provoke or escalate," Trudeau told reporters on Tuesday. Trudeau said the case is "extremely serious" and "has far reaching consequences... for Canada". Trudeau said his government did not rush to judgment in the case and had worked closely with its intelligence agencies. "We wanted to make sure that we had a solid grounding in understanding what was going on and analysis and indeed in facts," he said, adding that Ottawa had "fully shared with the government of India the seriousness... of our preoccupations and indeed conclusions".

Nijjar, whom India had declared a wanted terrorist, was gunned down on June 18 in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver home to a large Sikh community. Canada has the largest population of Sikhs globally outside of India, and New Delhi has long been unhappy with Canada's handling of Sikh separatist activists. Nijjar was part of a movement that advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state to be carved out of part.

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait strongly denounces Khor Abdullah ruling

NEW YORK/BAGHDAD: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah denounced in the strongest terms a recent Iraqi federal court ruling over the issue of Khor Abdullah, over which Kuwait and Iraq signed a 2012 agreement to regulate maritime navigation. Speaking to KUNA late Monday on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, Sheikh Salem said the Iraqi decision is based on ahistorical claims, affirming that he had reflected Kuwait's stance on the issue during his meetings with GCC foreign ministers.

Continued on Page 6

Study to allow expats to change jobs without employer's consent

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A top official at the Public Authority of Manpower said the authority is considering allowing expat workers to transfer to a new employer without the prior consent of the current employer in



NEW YORK: GCC and US foreign ministers hold a meeting on Sept 18, 2023. — KUNA

case they violate terms of the job contract. Acting deputy director of PAM Fahad Murad said any such move will not be allowed before confirming that the employer has violated terms of the labor contract or provisions of the labor law in the private sector.

Currently, expat workers are not allowed to change jobs before the labor contract expires unless employers allow them to do so. Expats in all Gulf states are linked to their employers under the so-called kafala or sponsorship system. Several Gulf states, including Kuwait, have announced plans to scrap the kafala system but no concrete action has been taken.

Murad told diplomatic representatives in Ku-

wait that the Public Authority of Manpower is carefully considering a series of measures to facilitate the transfer of expats from one employer to another. He gave no details. He said the authority is acting as a neutral body to ensure the rights of employees and employers.

Murad said there is no plan to seek amendments to the labor law in the private sector, but the authority is collecting notes and information to study if there is a need to amend the law. He said the authority is coordinating with concerned government bodies for the establishment of a shelter for male expats like the existing shelter for females. He gave no timeline for its establishment.

Azerbaijan launches Karabakh operation, urges surrender

BAKU: Azerbaijan on Tuesday launched an operation against the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region and demanded the surrender of Armenian separatists, warning it would "continue until the end". Separatists said Azerbaijan was using artillery, combat aircraft and attack drones and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called it a "ground offensive".

Fears of a fresh war have been growing recently, with Armenia accusing Azerbaijan of a troop build-up around the disputed Armenian-majority territory. An AFP journalist in the separatist stronghold of Stepanakert said blasts could be heard in the town. Several hours later, the AFP journalist said: "The shelling is continuing".

Azerbaijan's defense ministry said it was using "high precision weapons

on the front line and in depth". "Localized anti-terrorist measures have been launched in the region," the defence ministry said in a statement. Armenian separatists said five civilians were killed and 80 were wounded by the fighting, accusing Azerbaijani forces of "trying to advance" into Karabakh. "Fighting continues along the entire line of contact," the Armenian separatist army in Karabakh said on social media.

Azerbaijan said a construction worker was killed by shrapnel in the town of Shusha. Baku's presidency urged Karabakh separatists to lay down their arms and offered talks in the town of Yevlakh. "Illegal Armenian armed forces must raise the white flag," it said. "Otherwise, the anti-terrorist measures will continue until the end." The ex-Soviet Caucasus rivals have been locked in a decades-long dispute over Karabakh, fighting two wars over the mountainous territory in the 1990s and in 2020.

Continued on Page 6

Nagorno-Karabakh, a region disputed for three decades



Amir's Representative holds talks with Microsoft and Alphabet Google chiefs

PM receives Kuwait's Surgeon Wadhah Al-Riffai



NEW YORK: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah receives Kuwaiti surgeon Wadhah Al-Riffai (left), Executive Vice President and President of Microsoft Global Sales, Marketing and Operations Jean-Philippe Courtois (center) and Chief Investment Officer of Alphabet and Google Ruth Porat (right). — KUNA photos

In my view

Message for consumer protection department

By Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.com

The consumer is not merely a buyer; they are a vital citizen and resident who deserves protection against exploitation that goes against our country's core values. These values strive to ensure the overall security and wellbeing of everyone residing in Kuwait. One significant milestone in consumer protection came with the enactment of law 39/2014, which established the national committee for consumer protection, comprising 12 members from diverse sectors.

The ministry of commerce went the extra mile by establishing a comprehensive department exclusively dedicated to consumer protection. This department diligently oversees various aspects, even monitoring discussions on social media platforms to ensure consumer safety. What particularly interests me within the realm of consumer protection is item 3 of the law, which calls for the examination of proposals and recommendations submitted to the committee concerning consumer protection. I earnestly hope that my proposal reaches the esteemed members of the committee and the concerned department, and I extend my gratitude in advance for considering it.

Consumer exploitation in Kuwait has evolved beyond the conventional issues of commercial deception and price inflation. It has expanded into areas that demand a broader scope of consumer protection principles. As someone who has closely followed the complaints of citizens and residents, I have come across numerous instances where exploitation by tradespeople has proven to be more detrimental than traditional commercial deceit or price inflation. Today's consumer is grappling with challenges stemming from Kuwait's labor market, and safeguarding their interests has become an imperative necessity.

Currently, consumers are falling prey to unscrupulous laborers who are skilled in deception, often lacking the necessary knowledge and experience for the job at hand. In brief, Kuwait's labor market has transformed into a refuge for those without employment, with labor communities forming groups that sometimes resemble organized crime syndicates. These groups communicate and collaborate to exploit unsuspecting consumers.

Punishing these claimants (pretenders) alone is not a sustainable solution, as they are numerous and can easily find ways to re-enter the market. Instead, the most effective approach would be to establish small consumer centers in various neighborhoods. These centers could include lecture halls for conducting basic courses on repairing electrical faults, changing plumbing fixtures, mastering fundamental welding techniques, painting, carpentry and more.

Additionally, these centers could provide access to industrial tools for rent at affordable rates, allowing citizens to utilize the tools required for their household tasks. It's worth noting that this proposal is not a novel concept, as it is already in practice in many developed countries. In such countries, individuals with questionable skills are not permitted to enter people's homes to undertake tasks like replacing faucets, installing electrical fuses, or repairing unstable doors. These tasks are handled by competent professionals, not individuals who once worked as store clerks before transitioning to trades.

In contrast, in our context, we have become a testing ground for every unqualified laborer, using us to learn at our expense while causing more harm than good. Consumer protection must broaden its responsibilities and enhance its authority. Conventional commercial deception can be addressed relatively easily by avoiding purchases or seeking alternative products. However, the exploitation in trades is highly dangerous, as it pertains to essential needs of citizens.

Raising awareness, providing training and facilitating access to industrial tools represent the ideal solutions to combat this form of exploitation. This proposal is merely a suggestion, and I believe that the committee may have other ideas that could be even more impactful. Regardless of the approach taken, each effort contributes positively to the well-being of our people, the service of our nation, and, above all, seeks Allah's acceptance.

NEW YORK: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister, received Jean-Philippe Courtois, Executive Vice President and President of Microsoft Global Sales, Marketing and Operations on Monday. The meeting was attended by the Director General of the Direct Investment Promotion Authority, Sheikh Dr. Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah; Undersecretary of the Prime Minister's Office, Sheikh Khaled Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah; and Director of the Office of His Highness the Prime Minister, Hamad Al-Amer.

During the meeting, the country's development plan for digital transformation and artificial intelligence solutions were discussed, and views were exchanged on the mechanism of creating a digital infrastructure capable of attracting investment assets and creating a pioneering and distinguished business environment that contributes to the development of the national economy.

His Highness also received the Chief Investment Officer of Alphabet and Google, Ruth Porat, and her accompanying delegation. During the talks, developments in cooperation between Kuwait and Google Cloud were touched on after the recent signing of the strategic partnership

agreement between the two sides to support digital transformation in the country.

In another development, the Representative of His Highness the Amir also received the head of the departments of surgery and technical, academic, and scientific research at Creighton University Hospital, Dr. Wadhah Al-Riffai. His Highness expressed his appreciation for Dr. Al-Riffai's achievement for being appointed Chairman of the Board of Surgery Departments at the prestigious Creighton University Hospital, stressing the government's full support for national competencies in order to continue developing their professional careers at the highest levels. — KUNA

Does social media achieve justice?

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Since the advent of social media and its widespread use, numerous reports and analyses have been published regarding its negative impact on individuals, particularly those who are addicted to it and spend excessive amounts of time online. However, these social media platforms have also become significant sources of information for their users, playing a crucial role in disseminating events quickly to the audience, especially for those who are victims or facing misfortunes.

Social media has been instrumental in assisting many people in resolving seemingly insurmountable problems that would have otherwise remained unresolved, and numerous stories attest to the importance of this tool in rescuing individuals from disasters. Kuwait Times gauged public opinion on whether social media is an effective means of addressing complex issues by making them public. While some individuals agreed with this notion, others deemed it unnecessary, expressing concerns that some people exploit their

problems as a means to gain fame. Alaa Abdulrahman, a Palestinian woman residing in the United Arab Emirates, provides a compelling example of how social media played a pivotal role in rescuing her children and herself from a dire situation. Her husband had abducted her three children and taken them to her home country, Palestine, where she was prohibited from entering due to the occupation. Alaa turned to social media for desperate help, having been granted custody of her children by UAE courts following a divorce. However, implementing the court's ruling was nearly impossible in a country under occupation.

Over a two-year period of seeking assistance through social media, with the intervention of numerous social media celebrities and the use of hundreds of hashtags to raise awareness, Alaa was able to win her seemingly hopeless case. She successfully reunited with her children in the UAE, later revealing that her children had endured violence at the hands of their uncle and relatives.

Expatriate Mona Abdallah expressed full support for people who use social media to seek help, emphasizing that society should take substantial action to assist them. She acknowledged that while some individuals misuse social media for personal gain, it should not overshadow the genuine needs of others seeking assistance.

Citizen Amani Omar stressed that social media can have a profoundly positive impact, particularly in cases



related to justice. She cited the example of a viral video depicting the physical abuse of a student in India solely because of his Muslim identity, believing that the video going viral on social media played a pivotal role in holding the perpetrators accountable. On the other hand, citizen Msaed Abdulrahman noted that social media has emboldened some individuals to exploit the pain of others. "Many people believe it's a form of jest to deceive others into thinking they are victims of abuse, not solely for the purpose of gaining fame, but also to attract attention to themselves," he stressed.

Free Jabriya: A constellation of national talent behind 'Feykom Tarab: A Night with Miami'

KUWAIT: "Free Jabriya", the producer of the visual music show "Feykom Tarab: A Night with Miami", which is scheduled to take place from Sept 28 to Oct 2, revealed the work is supported by a constellation of the one of the most creative national and international talents specialized in the field of theatrical performances and concerts. Free Jabriya explained in a statement that the work, which is directed by Maryam Al-Khatrath and Jassem Al-Qames, has taken more than a year and a half to prepare, during which the work team was coordinated and the creative vision was presented.

Theater design is carried out by Rebecca Browner, who specializes in designing theaters for live performances and theater. She was part of the design team for the 2012 London Olympics, in addition to designing a number of theatrical performances in London, such as the live show "Peaky Blinders" and a number of shows in cooperation with Netflix, BBC and Amazon.

The lighting team includes Terry Cook, who recently worked with a number of international star concerts such as Elton John, Adele, The Rolling Stones, AC/DC and many more. Flint Studio led by Leo Flint, whose name has been accompanied by many international shows such as Cold Play, Beyonce and many other international shows and plays, took care of videography design.

Flint is accompanied in his work by a Kuwaiti video design team led by Ahmed Bodham, who previously designed the show "The Eighties" in Kuwait, and a number of other works in the field of television, in addition to the Kuwaiti production company Sand Globe Animation led by Saud Al-Enezi and Salah Salem, who have previously presented many designs and illustrations in many local and Gulf works.

As for fashion design, British designer Susan Kulkarni presented her designs for one of the biggest Disneyland Paris shows, and many live works by "Secret Cinemas" such as Star Wars, Bridgerton and Blade Runner, in addition to previously supervising the costumes in Martin Scorsese's film "Silence". Suzan is accompanied by Adel Al-Asaad. His team specializes in implementing costumes and makeup, previously performing many theatrical and television works in Kuwait and abroad, including "Memoirs of a Sailor", which was shown at

the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center.

The choreography team is led by Shelby Williams, who works in theatrical performance design in London, most recently the play "Oklahoma", which won several theater awards last year, and has presented the Swan Lake show and many other works. Shelby's co-designer is Aisha Al-Qatami from Kuwait, who specializes in Afro-Beats and has her own studio in Kuwait.

As for the musical aspect, the formation consists purely of Kuwaiti music groups epitomizing the spirit of Miami Band, supervised by Dr. Ahmed Al-Salhi from Scene Artistic Production Company, who leads a team of about 30 musicians who accompany Miami Band in presenting the songs of the show. They will be led by maestro Dr. Khaled Nouri, who has great experience in leading musical bands, who redistributed the songs accompanied by Hussa Al-Humaidhi. The sound equipment is engineered by Italian Andrea Talgia, who has previously worked with international opera singer Andrea Bocelli and accompanied him in concerts around the world.

It is worth mentioning that "Feykom Tarab" is a unique musical experience that introduces the audience to the magical world of the Miami Band, as it is not just a Miami concert, but a celebration of the career of one of the most prominent bands in the region, who accompanied us through generations and reached all parts of the world. The production is supervised by executive producer Ali Al-Nusif, in addition to Peter Huntley from the British "Smart Entertainment", and production manager Zaina Ammouna from Free Jabriya, while the visual identity of the show was designed by Munira Al-Shami.

Founded in 2018 by Ali Al-Nusif and Jassem Al-Qames, "Free Jabriya" works with young and talented creators to produce renewed and innovative works of art through which they address young generations with the aim of making a qualitative leap in the entertainment sector in Kuwait and the region, through a number of successful artworks, most notably "Taqdeer Ihtiyaj", "Min Ghair Tahini", "Social Needia", "Rahbaniyat with Omar Rahbani" and the "Ruh Al-Sharq" choir, in addition to directing the show "Ayna Tath-hab hatha Al-Massa: 80s".



Kuwait sends more relief aid, medical supplies to Libya

KUWAIT: A sixth planeload of aid left Kuwait for storm-struck Libya on Tuesday with tons of relief equipment and medical supplies onboard. Deputy Director General of the Kuwait Relief Society, Omar Al-Thuwaini, told KUNA that the Libyan people affected by the storm are in dire need of medical supplies in light of the spread of various epidemics and diseases due to the humanitarian disaster.

The first batch of supplies took

off from Kuwait last Wednesday, followed by the second on Thursday and the third on Saturday, all carrying tons of necessary materials on board. Since disaster struck last Sunday, perhaps the largest catastrophe to hit Libya in 30 years, leaving in its wake thousands dead and others missing and injured, Kuwaiti humanitarian bodies have hastened to rile up efforts and provide urgent relief to the Libyan people. — KUNA



Local

Zain Innovation Campus hosts bootcamp of regional TV show Beban



The bootcamp participants at ZINC.



Industry experts will cover a range of key business topics.

- Bootcamp held in partnership with SACGC, under the umbrella of Zain Great Idea startup accelerator program
- 40 Kuwaiti startups join intensive bootcamp, 5 will be selected to be featured on the show

KUWAIT: Through their partnership with Beban, the regional entrepreneurship-themed reality TV show, Zain and Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) - a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), announce the hosting of the show's bootcamp at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC). From over 75 applicants, 40 Kuwaiti startups were selected to enroll in the intensive bootcamp for the chance to be one of 5 startups from Kuwait to join Beban's upcoming third season.

The bootcamp, which runs for two weeks at ZINC, offers invaluable training material presented by industry experts, and covers a wide range of topics that are key to any aspiring business owner, like understanding funding sources, business models, market research and go to market strategy, business strategy and risk management, and more.

The bootcamp also covers company identity and values, crowdfunding, strategy planning, investor relations, business financials, financial statements, valuations and forecasting, corporate governance and term sheets, and more. At the end of the bootcamp, the participants will learn how to pitch their businesses to investors

and potential business partners, an invaluable skill they will need should they be selected to join the third season of Beban, where they will have the chance to pitch in front of a panel of regional investors for equity investment and strategic business development opportunities.

Zain and SACGC's partnership with Beban comes under the umbrella of the award-winning Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program, which was recently named Ecosystem Enabler of the Year in the Region by the prestigious Entrepreneur Middle East magazine. This award recognized the program's leadership in promoting a vibrant tech startup acceleration ecosystem. It also attests to Zain's endless efforts to empower Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, accelerate hundreds of startups, and embrace thousands of aspiring minds for 13 years.

The new season of ZGI comes with a fresh approach that is more flexible, giving entrepreneurs and startup owners more freedom to join the programs, sessions, bootcamps, and workshops at their own pace. Since each participant is unique in their schedule, business size, and needs, they will no longer have to commit to a fixed schedule of training. The partnership with Beban is the first of ZGI's many pro-



40 Kuwaiti entrepreneurs have the chance to join Beban's third season.

grams in its new season, which will feature even more bootcamps, regional accelerators, and other leading programs.

Beban, an entrepreneurship-themed reality TV show, is one of the top programs of its kind in the region where entrepreneurs pitch to investors for immediate investment offers and strategic business opportunities. The program is a production of Hope Ventures, the investment arm of Hope Fund, established by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain.

Beban is aired on Shahid and a num-

ber of major regional TV channels. Zain and SACGC's partnership with Beban as Country Partners from Kuwait reflects their shared commitment and interest to nurture the growth of the local entrepreneurship ecosystem and empower aspiring Kuwaiti talents to embark and build on their business journeys by providing them with the tools and resources needed to scale their businesses to new markets across the GCC.

In its previous seasons, Beban aired on Shahid, the region's first and biggest

video-on-demand platform, as well as leading regional TV channels such as Al Rai TV, Dubai TV, and Bahrain TV. It featured a total of 62 businesses of various sizes and resulted in successful co-investments by the private and public sectors that exceeded \$6 million in GCC-based startups. Season 3 of Beban is anticipated to feature 40 regional opportunities from the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the State of Kuwait.



Participants take a group photo during the forum. — KUNA photos

US diplomat hails health cooperation with Kuwait

KUWAIT: The US Charge d'Affaires in Kuwait, James Holtzner, lauded the deep-rooted Kuwait-US relations and the cooperation between the two countries in the health sector on Tuesday. Speaking to reporters after inaugurating "the forum of the Kuwait-US partnership in the health sector," Holtzner said the event would witness a display of state-of-the-art medical innovations. It is a great opportunity for expanding cooperation, he said, indicating the prospects of making deals with participating companies to assist the local health sector in treating diverse cases and diseases.

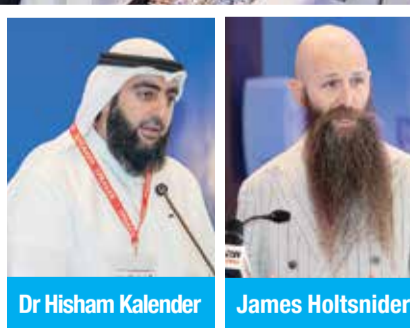
The participating American delegation represents 12 health sys-

tems, he said, expressing aspiration to enhance further cooperation with Kuwait under the sponsorship of the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. Elaborating, he indicated that the cooperation would broaden at the levels of data swap, expertise transfer, modern technology, cooperation with private hospitals, treating children with cancer, organ transplants, and chronic cases.

The forum is organized by the embassy in cooperation with the USCIPP - the US Cooperative for International Patient Programs, an organizational membership program of the National Center for Healthcare Leadership (NCHL), a Chicago-based nonprofit



institution. USCIPP is composed of US academic medical centers, hospitals, and health systems that operate in the international patient care and global healthcare collaboration markets. Founded in 2010 with support from the International Trade Administration's Market Development Cooperator Program, the consortium now represents nearly 60 US healthcare provider organizations. — KUNA



Dr Hisham Kalender

James Holtzner

Kuwait, France set for first ever friendship committee meeting

KUWAIT: The Chief of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mohammad Al-Sager, discussed, along with the French Ambassador to the country, Claire Le Flecher, preparations for the first ever Kuwaiti-French friendship committee meeting taking place in Paris on September 28. Chamber Chief Al-Sager, also head of the Kuwaiti side, men-

tioned in a press statement that this visit aims to find the best possible solutions for challenges to achieve economic development between both nations.

Al-Sager commended the significant role of the French Embassy for their contributions and added that he is looking forward to meeting with the French side to look over economic, cultural, and social opportunities. As for the French diplomat, she expressed her gratitude for the swift response in forming the committee and heading over to the French capital for the first meeting, saying that the second meeting is set to be held in Kuwait next year. The committee was established with the aim of strengthening and cementing relations as well as extending collaboration bridges between both nations. — KUNA



The Chief of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mohammad Al-Sager meets with French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher.

Cabinet OKs decree calling Parliament to convene October 31

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet approved a draft decree calling on the National Assembly to convene for the second regular session of the seventeenth legislative term on Tuesday, October 31, 2023, and submitting it to His Highness the Crown Prince. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting Monday, chaired by Acting Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Essa Ahmad Al-Kandari stated the following: The Cabinet was informed of the official delegation accompanying His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his upcoming visit to China's city of Hangzhou.

The delegation includes the Deputy Prime Minister, Oil Minister, and State Minister of Economic and Investment Affairs, Dr. Saad Al-Barrak; Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; Minister of Commerce and Minister of State of Youth Affairs, Mohammad Al-Aiban. Moreover, the delegation includes the Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Dr. Jassem Al-Ostad; the Minister of Justice and the Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Faleh Al-Ruqba, in addition to several state officials. — KUNA

WFP praises Kuwait's long-term support

KUWAIT: Representative of the World Food Program (WFP) in the GCC, Mohammad Yahya, affirmed on Tuesday Kuwait's continuous support in emergency and humanitarian response activities. Yahya stated to KUNA on the program's launch, "We are working closely with the Kuwaiti government to provide long-term sustainable support to the most vulnerable communities around the world." He added that, regarding the lack of funding and the deteriorating level of food security worldwide, Kuwait contributed \$18.8 million in 2023 to support WFP operations in various countries.

He also added that WFP is struggling to meet global needs for food aid with a decrease of 60 percent this year, noting that it is the highest rate recorded in the program's history, which forced them to only rescue people that are suffering from hunger. He stated that "it is no longer limited to the fact that we have received much less funding, but also to the fact that we need more this year." He continued, "The gap between funding needs and humanitarian needs has widened steadily and has been amplified by new conflicts, the global economy, and the climate crisis." The World Food Program was established in 1961 and is considered the largest humanitarian organization to support people recovering from conflict, disasters, and climate change using food assistance. — KUNA

Local

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customs, info
committee meet

CAIRO: The 32nd meeting of the Arab League's customs and information committee started Tuesday at the headquarters of the General Secretariat, chaired by Saudi Arabia, with the participation of representatives of the customs administrations in the Arab countries. The Chief of the Economic Integration Directorate at the League of Arab States, Bahjat Abu Al-Nasser, said in his opening statement that the agenda would include a number of important topics.

Updating the relevant contact points, following up on customs issues, the Advance Rulings Guide, and the Arab Guide to the conditions and procedures for granting licenses and practicing the customs clearance profession will be discussed, Abu Al-Nasser added. Member states will update the contact points concerned with following up on all customs issues related to the Greater Arab Free Trade Area and the Arab Customs Union negotiation phase, he noted. Other issues will include the member states' comments on the unified guide to advance decisions, which will facilitate customs clearance procedures and requirements and the proper release of goods.

The meeting will focus on facilitating trade exchanges between member states and the outside world in general, as the guide was prepared to be compatible with the obligations of member states in the Agreement to Facilitate and Develop Trade Exchange between Arab Countries and as a guide to the best global practices in this field.

Member states' comments on the unified guide for the conditions and procedures for granting licenses and practicing the customs clearance profession in Arab countries will also be discussed, which regulates the relationship between customs administrations in member states and customs brokers to ensure border protection and to help expedite the completion of customs procedures for imported and exported goods. — KUNA

Yerevan State
University honors
Kuwaiti poet

KUWAIT: A formal delegation from Yerevan State University (YSU) of Armenia honored the chairman of the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, with an honorary doctorate degree on Monday. The delegation chose to honor Al-Babtain in his home country in an unprecedented move to show appreciation for his prominent role in boosting cultural, social, and humanitarian aspects on an international level.

Speaking on this occasion, Al-Babtain said, "to be honored by Yerevan University in my country brings me great pride," pointing out that serving communities in education, culture, and humanitarian aid aims to

NCCAL's 23rd music festival
honors Abdul-Rabb Idris

Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature honors Dr Abdul-Rabb Idris. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: The 23rd International Music Festival of Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature (NCCAL) opened at the theater of the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center on Monday evening under the aegis of Minister of Information and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul-

incentive individuals to engage in such initiatives. "An honorary doctorate degree is not a piece of paper to hang on my wall, but it is a message that human lives are valued by their willingness to give without expecting anything in return."

Al-Babtain added he affirmed that such honor and other recognitions he won during his life are means of recognition of Kuwait's leading role in promoting humanitarian aid and an honor to the Kuwaiti people as well. The honoring ceremony was attended by cultural and public figures, along with professors from Yerevan State University. Yerevan State University is the first and leading higher education institution in Armenia. — KUNA



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain



Yerevan State University honors Kuwaiti poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain. — KUNA photos

EPA celebrates day
for reservation of
the ozone layer

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) celebrated the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer on Monday, affirming the need for serious measures to face climate change. In her speech at the ceremony, EPA Director General Samira Al-Kandari said Kuwait is eager to execute all efforts to protect the ozone layer through its commitments to international agreements on the matter. Kuwait had executed several national projects and programs on protecting the layer, and it also joined the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone in 1992, she said.

EPA's Supreme Council has limited the import of substances that affect the ozone layer and is supervising trade in such substances in Kuwait, she added. Meanwhile, the official noted that the GCC states agreed on improving the Gulf's unified system on ozone-depleting substances during their meeting in Oman a few days ago. They agreed on ratifying the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, presented by Bahrain and Kuwait during the meeting, she said.

The Kuwaiti delegation played an effective role in connecting views on the suggested amendments to the protocol to reach the final statement of the Kigali agreement in 2016. Kuwait had been the general coordinator of the Asian group since 2008, Al-Kandari said. Al-Kandari noted that the main challenge facing the GCC countries is committing to the Montreal Protocol in dealing with the growth of hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) substance reserves used for cooling and refrigeration. These substances affect global warming, and there is a lack of alternatives for countries with hot weather, she explained.

The EPA will organize a training course in Q1 2024 for workers in refrigeration companies to apply the Kigali amendments to reduce the use of such substances, said the official. On his part, head of the ozone department Yaqoub Al-Matouq said that Kuwait is set to execute the articles of the suggested Kigali amendments, which will be presented to the GCC leaders for approval. The amendment will be funded by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

The Kigali amendment is set to be executed in 2024, except for the GCC countries, as they've been given a period of eight years for execution due to the nature of their hot climate, he noted. Meanwhile, Executive Secretary of the Ozone Secretariat of UNEP Tina Birmpili hailed Kuwait's role and efforts to protect the ozone layer in a video call during the event. UNEP will continue cooperating with Kuwait to enhance efforts to protect the ozone layer, she added. — KUNA



NCCAL'S 23rd music festival

rahman Al-Mutairi. Representing the minister at the opening ceremony, NCCAL's Secretary-General, Dr Mohammad Al-Jassar, honored Dr Abdul-Rabb Idris, a well-known Saudi composer and singer, for his contributions to Arab fine music.

Bader Nouri, Musaed Al-Baloushi, and Fahad

Al-Salem sang pleasant melodies written by Idris and other Arab composers. The festival will see a special celebration to mark the golden jubilee of NCCAL and a closing ceremony commemorating the Egyptian late composer Mohammad Abdul-Wahhab on Friday, September 22. — KUNA

Pfizer raises awareness about
chronic inflammatory disease

KUWAIT: To mark the occasion of Atopic Dermatitis Awareness Day, held annually on 14 September, Pfizer hosted a media roundtable to raise awareness about this chronic inflammatory disease and how it impacts the quality of life for patients. Attended by leading local medical professionals, the roundtable was designed to understand atopic dermatitis triggers, symptoms and how to manage them and recognize when to see a dermatologist.

Atopic dermatitis, also known as atopic eczema or eczema, is one of the most common chronic inflammatory skin conditions, affecting people of all ages and genders around the world. It appears as a rash (or skin lesions), causes itching, and may worsen or flare over time. More than "just a rash", atopic dermatitis can be potentially debilitating condition that disrupts patients' daily lives and can negatively impact their emotional well-being.

Specifically, atopic dermatitis can lead to disturbed sleep, embarrassment, and difficulty concentrating, among other things. Atopic dermatitis can be classified as mild, moderate, or severe depending on several factors, including the extent and severity of disease. According to a study conducted last year by the Global Burden of Disease, about 223 million people are living with atopic dermatitis, of which around 43 million are aged between 1 to 4 years old. This illustrates the strikingly high prevalence in young children.

Dr Atfal Al-Lafi, Vice President at Kuwait Society of Dermatologists, Chairman of Dermatology Council and Head of Dermatology Department at As-ad Al Hamad Dermatology Center in Kuwait, commented, "Atopic dermatitis is so much more than just a rash, and it goes beyond the surface of the skin. The most common symptom of atopic dermatitis is itching, which can be severe, while other symptoms like red dry patches of the skin can flare in multiple areas of the body at the same time and can appear in the same locations and in new locations. It is important to keep working towards increasing atopic dermatitis awareness and encouraging early referral to improve patient outcomes in Kuwait."

Dr Abeer Al-Bazali, General Secretary at Kuwait Society of Dermatologists and Head of Dermatology



Dr Nadine Tarcha, Dr Abeer Abdullah Al-Bazali and Dr Atfal Al-Lafi take a group photo.

Department at Farwaniya Hospital in Kuwait added, "the reality for patients living with chronic inflammatory skin disease such as moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis is that many experience debilitating symptoms and it can both significantly disrupt their daily lives and negatively impact their emotional well-being."

Fortunately, today the field of atopic dermatitis management is advancing with new, more targeted medication which can be given orally, offering new horizons for patients whose disease is not adequately controlled with other systemic drug products, or when use of other therapies is inadvisable. Therefore, patients must see a doctor if they suspect they may be experiencing atopic dermatitis symptoms."

Dr Nadine Tarcha, Gulf Medical Director, Pfizer, commented: "As a chronic inflammatory disease impacting mental, physical and social well-being, atopic dermatitis patients can face a lifetime of challenges impacting relationships and their productivity if not managed properly. On this Atopic Dermatitis Awareness Day, we continue to drive our focus on increasing awareness so that patients can understand better this disease, its symptoms, and triggers. At Pfizer Gulf, we apply science to bring breakthroughs that significantly improve the life of people living with chronic inflammatory diseases, which can be debilitating and distressing, dramatically affecting what they can do."



Participants pose for a group photo.



Children trek to makeshift tent school in quake-hit Morocco

Freed Americans land in US

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NEW YORK: US President Joe Biden addresses the 78th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City on Sept 19, 2023. — AFP

Biden warns UN assembly against appeasing Russia

Zelensky takes UN stage for first time since war

Closure of key Gaza crossing 'illegal': NGO

GAZA: The Zionists' decision to shut a key crossing to workers from Gaza was slammed Tuesday as "collective punishment" by an NGO based in the Zionist entity and one of thousands of Palestinians affected.

Zionists announced late Sunday it would keep the Erez crossing closed following a "security assessment" by defense officials. "The reopening of the crossing will be subject to ongoing evaluation based on the evolving situation in the region," said COGAT, a unit of the Zionist defense ministry responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs.

The Zionists have issued work permits to some 18,500 Gazans, COGAT said on Tuesday. The decision to block their entry to the occupied Palestinian territories was condemned as "illegal collective punishment" by the NGO Gisha, which advocates for Palestinians' freedom of movement.

The move is "harming Gaza workers and their families, as well as other permit holders who need to travel for humanitarian needs," Gisha said in a statement. Gazan officials said medical cases were still allowed to use the crossing, which the Zionists had been due to reopen Monday following a shutdown due to Jewish holidays.

The extended closure follows repeated clashes between Palestinian protesters and Zionist forces along the border over the past few days. The Zionist military also launched an air strike late Friday targeting a "military post" of the Islamist group Hamas that rules the Gaza Strip.

One of the Gazans affected, Kamal, said he and fellow workers "have nothing to do with the security situation in Gaza." "Closing Erez costs my family and me our food and living expenses," said the 41-year-old construction worker, who gave only his first name for fear of reprisal from the Zionist authorities.

Palestinians have far higher earning power in the occupied Palestinian land than Gaza, where salaries are low and unemployment is rife. Ashraf, 36, expressed the same concerns as he described the closure as "collective punishment against workers." "We only want to work and live," said the permit holder. — AFP

UNITED NATIONS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky took center-stage at the United Nations on Tuesday where US President Joe Biden warned the world against trying to "appease" Russia's "naked aggression." Wearing his trademark military fatigues, Zelensky joined the annual UN General Assembly for the first time since the war and listened intently as Biden urged solidarity against Russia's invasion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin — who did not come to New York — is expecting that the world "will grow weary and allow it to brutalize Ukraine without consequence," Biden said. "But I ask you this: If we abandon the core principles of the UN Charter to appease an aggressor, can any member state in this body feel confident that they are protected? If we allow Ukraine to be carved up, is the independence of any nation secure?" Biden said. "We must stand up to this naked aggression today to deter other would-be aggressors tomorrow."

Biden won applause from the chamber when he called for Ukraine's territorial integrity, but several prominent world leaders decided to miss this year's UN session, including from China, and allies Britain and France. Zelensky is set to meet leaders less friendly to Ukraine's cause, including Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who has said previously that

Ukraine shared blame for the war and faulted the billions of dollars in Western military aid to Kyiv. Lula, who casts himself as a neutral mediator, told the General Assembly that "work needs to be done to create space for negotiations." "A lot is invested in weapons and very little in development," Lula said.

Zelensky, who until recently only traveled in utmost secrecy, will on Wednesday take part in a special session on Ukraine at the UN Security Council, where Russia is a permanent member wielding a veto over any binding actions. He is also due to stop in Washington. Visiting a New York hospital treating wounded Ukrainian soldiers on Monday, Zelensky said that the United Nations still provides "a place for Russian terrorists."

Dire climate crisis warnings

Russia has met overwhelming criticism at the General Assembly over its February 2022 invasion, but the focus on the war has also drawn criticism from developing countries who believe it has distracted the West especially from other urgent priorities. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the General Assembly with a bleak speech highlighting the recent floods that killed thousands in Derna, Libya.

"Even as we speak now, bodies are washing ashore from the same Mediterranean Sea where billionaires

sunbathe on their super yachts," Guterres said. "Derna is a sad snapshot of the state of our world — the flood of inequity, of injustice, of inability to confront the challenges in our midst."

In similarly dark language, Biden used his speech to highlight the flooding as well as wildfires in North America and Europe and drought in the Horn of Africa. "Taken together these snapshots tell an urgent story of what awaits us if we fail to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and begin to climate-proof our world," Biden said in the excerpts.

Zelensky will use his UN trip to meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who have both maintained relations with Russia — as well as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a key ally. Addressing a reception to mark Germany's 50 years in the United Nations, Scholz voiced alarm about the "new rifts opening up in the world." "Imperialism is once again showing its ugly face," he said.

Biden in his speech offered reassurances about the intense competition between the United States and China, which has spurred warnings that the world could face a new Cold War. "When it comes to China, I want to be clear and consistent. We seek to responsibly manage the competition between our countries, so it does not tip into conflict," Biden said. — AFP

Phone, Internet cut in Derna after protests

DERNA: Telephone and Internet links were severed Tuesday to Libya's flood-hit city of Derna, a day after hundreds protested there against local authorities they blamed for the thousands of deaths. A tsunami-sized flash flood broke through two ageing river dams upstream from the city on the night of September 10 and razed entire neighborhoods, sweeping untold thousands into the Mediterranean Sea.

Protesters massed on Monday at the city's grand mosque, venting their anger at local and regional authorities they blamed for failing to maintain the dams or to provide early warning of the disaster. "Thieves and traitors must hang," they shouted, before some protesters torched the house of the town's unpopular mayor.

On Tuesday, phone and online links to Derna were severed, an outage the national telecom company LPTIC blamed on "a rupture in the optical fiber" link to Derna, in a statement on its Facebook page. The telecom company said the outage, which also affected other areas in eastern Libya, "could be the result of a deliberate act of

sabotage" and pledged that "our teams are working to repair it as quickly as possible". Rescue workers have kept digging for bodies, with the official death toll at around 3,300 but many thousands more missing since the flood sparked by torrential rains from Mediterranean Storm Daniel. The huge wall of water that smashed into Derna completely destroyed 891 buildings and damaged over 600 more, according to a Libyan government report based on satellite images.

Angry protest

Oil-rich Libya was torn by more than a decade of war and chaos after a 2011 NATO-backed uprising led to the ouster and killing of dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Myriad militias, mercenary forces and jihadists battled for power, while basic services and the upkeep of infrastructure were badly neglected.

Libya remains split between a UN-backed and nominally interim government in Tripoli in the west, and another in the disaster-hit east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. Haftar's forces seized Derna in 2018, then a stronghold of radical Islamists, and with the reputation as a protest stronghold since Gaddafi's days.

On Monday, demonstrators in Derna chanted angry slogans against the parliament in eastern Libya and its leader Aguilah Saleh. "The people want parliament to fall," they chanted. Others shouted "Aguila is the enemy of God", and a protest statement called for "legal action against those responsible for the disaster". Al-Masara

television reported that the head of the eastern-based government, Oussama Hamad, responded by dissolving the Derna municipal council. Libya watchers on Tuesday considered the telecom outage of Derna a deliberate act, intended to shut down the protesters' voices. Emadeddin Badi, Libya specialist at the Atlantic Council, wrote on X, formerly Twitter, of a "media blockade on #Derna in place now, communications cut since dawn. "Have no doubt, this is not about health or safety, but about punishing the protesters in Derna."

Tarek Megrissi, senior policy fellow at the European Council on International Relations, wrote on X of "extremely grim news from #Derna, still reeling from the horrific floods. "Residents are now terrified of an imminent military crackdown, seen as collective punishment for yesterday's protest and demands."

Those warnings come as the city remains in desperate need. Tens of thousands of residents are homeless and short of clean water, food and basic supplies amid a growing risk of cholera, diarrhea, dehydration and malnutrition, UN agencies have warned.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called the Derna flood a symbol of the world's ills as he opened the annual General Assembly. "Even as we speak now, bodies are washing ashore from the same Mediterranean Sea where billionaires sunbathe on their super yachts," Guterres said. "Derna is a sad snapshot of the state of our world — the flood of inequity, of injustice, of inability to confront the challenges in our midst." — AFP

International

Freed Americans land in US

Swap marks thaw in US-Iran relations but observers remain cautious

WASHINGTON: Five Americans freed by Iran in a high-stakes prisoner swap landed back in the United States on Tuesday to a joyous reunion with family members. The five arrived aboard an executive jet at an airfield in Fort Belvoir southwest of Washington.

Relatives waved US flags and hugged the freed prisoners as they disembarked from the aircraft, then posed for a group photograph, grinning widely. "Welcome home," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan posted on X, formerly Twitter. The former prisoners, including one held for eight years, were part of a rare prisoner exchange between Washington and Tehran, a deal that included the unfreezing of \$6 billion in fund, frozen by US ally South Korea.

The swap marked a slight thaw in relations between the two countries over a host of issues, including Iran's advances in its nuclear program, although some observers urged caution in viewing the release as a sign of change. The prisoners arrived on a flight from the Gulf state of Qatar, which helped facilitate the exchange, negotiated over several months. They will receive a medical checkup in the Washington area.

The Biden administration has rejected criticism at home that it was paying "ransom," insisting the money will be used only for humanitarian purposes, with a threat to re-freeze the funds if not. But Iran has insisted it has full access. The money "cruelly blocked until now and

currently in the possession of the Islamic republic belongs to the people (of Iran) and we will use them to meet the people's needs," President Ebrahim Raisi said in New York.

One of the freed prisoners praised Biden for ignoring the political backlash and taking the "incredibly difficult decisions" that freed them. "Thank you, President Biden, for ultimately putting the lives of American citizens above politics," Siamak Namazi, a businessman held by Iran since 2015, said in a statement.

Other freed prisoners include wildlife conservationist Morad Tahbaz and venture capitalist Emad Sharqi, both of whom were held at the notorious Evin Prison but placed under house arrest last month. Two other US prisoners involved in the swap have not been publicly identified. All are Iranian-Americans.

The five Iranian prisoners released by the United States were convicted or charged with nonviolent crimes, with one already set to be released soon, officials said. Some observers viewed the prisoner exchange cautiously. "We are not naive," European Council President Charles Michel told journalists Monday at the United Nations.

"We can also observe the very brutal repression" in Iran, he said, including "the use of kidnappings by the Iranian authorities to put pressure on some governments including in the EU." "We do not underestimate the level of tensions and difficulties." — AFP



FORT BELVOIR: Family members embrace Siamak Namazi (second right), after disembarking from an airplane at Davison Army Airfield at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, on Sept 19, 2023. — AFP

Syria's Assad to visit China Thursday: Office

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will visit China from Thursday, his office said, his first trip to the allied country since before the Syrian civil war broke out more than 12 years ago. China will be the third non-Arab country Assad visits since before the conflict, which has killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and industry.

"In response to an official invitation" from Chinese President Xi Jinping, Assad and his wife "will visit China starting Thursday", the presidency said in a statement. "The visit includes a number of meetings and events" in Beijing and Hangzhou, the statement said, adding that Assad would be accompanied by "a political and economic delegation".

Pro-government newspaper Al-Watan said Assad was expected to attend the opening of the Asian Games in Hangzhou on September 23. Beijing has provided Damascus with international support, particularly at the UN Security Council, where it has repeatedly abstained from resolutions against Damascus. Officials from both countries have also made visits over the years.

The announcement comes six months after a surprise China-brokered deal saw longtime regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to restore diplomatic relations and reopen their respective embassies. —AFP

US, China call for stable ties in latest talks

UNITED NATIONS: America's top diplomat and China's vice president voiced hope Monday for more stability in the often tense relationship as the rival powers held their second high-level talks in days.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meeting Vice President Han Zheng in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, said he believed in "face-to-face diplomacy" to deal with disagreements. "I think it's a good thing that we have this opportunity to build on the recent high-level engagements that our countries have had," Blinken told Han as they opened their meeting at China's mission to the United Nations.

The talks aim to "make sure that we're maintaining open communications and demonstrate that we are responsibly managing the relationship between our two countries," Han said that the world's two largest economies face "a lot of difficulties and challeng-

es." "The world needs healthy and stable US-China relations, which benefit not only China and the US, but the whole world," he said.

The meeting comes as the United States watches personnel changes in Beijing with growing intrigue. Qin Gang, handpicked by President Xi Jinping as foreign minister, was abruptly replaced in July by the veteran policymaker Wang Yi. US officials initially expected Wang to travel to the annual UN meeting, where he may have met briefly with President Joe Biden, but instead China sent Han, better known for his tenure as mayor of Shanghai than for diplomacy. But Wang, who also is the Communist Party foreign policy director, held talks over the weekend with Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, in Malta.

The United States and China remain at loggerheads on a host of issues including Taiwan, the self-ruling democracy that Beijing claims and has not ruled out seizing by force. China charges that the United States is stirring up Taiwanese independence supporters and has repeatedly staged shows of force. The United States says it is seeking the preservation of the status quo and has stepped up support, including last month for



NEW YORK: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Vice President Han Zheng shake hands while meeting on Sept 18, 2023. — AFP

the first time approving direct military aid to Taiwan, which traditionally buys its own weapons.

Blinken in the talks "underscored the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said. Touching on nations with close ties with China, Blinken also discussed the "provocative actions" by North Korea and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Miller said.

China has also been outraged by US restrictions on high-end invest-

ment and exports of semiconductors from the United States, which says it is doing that to safeguard its own security. But the tone has become comparatively civil. Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen both traveled this year to Beijing, resuming contact that had all but ceased during the pandemic. The approach to China stands in contrast with the US refusal of most dialogue with Russia since the invasion of Ukraine, with Blinken and other senior US officials doubting the utility of talking to Moscow. — AFP

Kuwait strongly denounces Khor...

Continued from Page 1

He reiterated Kuwait's stance during the GCC foreign ministers' meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, affirming the gathering came out with consensus of views on the issue. Sheikh Salem hoped the Iraqi government would take necessary steps to handle the case and respect the sovereignty of Kuwait and agreed-upon treaties.

During the GCC-US ministerial meeting, Sheikh Salem presented a narrative on the recent verdict by the Iraqi supreme court, which scrapped the agreement on maritime navigation in Khor Abdullah, according to a press release from the Kuwaiti foreign ministry. The agreement, ratified by parliaments of both Kuwait and Iraq in 2013, was lodged at the UN, the minister told the meeting, noting that the Iraqi court ruling contained offending fallacies against Kuwait.

Blinken said he understood Kuwait's stance on the agreement, stressing the US' commitment to protecting Kuwait's security, safety, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the security of the Gulf region. The GCC-US meeting dealt also with regional topics of common interest and strategic partnership between the GCC and the US, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah expressed late Monday Kuwait's firm stance on the Khor Abdullah agreement with Iraq, saying the latter's federal court took an unnecessary decision based on ahistorical claims. According to

a foreign ministry statement, Sheikh Jarrah reflected Kuwait's stance on the matter during his participation in the GCC-UK meeting held on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly in New York. The meeting discussed a variety of issues including cooperation and strategic partnership between the GCC and the UK.

Meanwhile, Head of the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council Faiq Zaidan stressed on Tuesday during a meeting with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq Tariq Al-Faraj "Iraq's respect for Kuwait's history, present and future, and the independence of Kuwait through various historical eras". He also affirmed "the importance of respecting and implementing the agreements and treaties between Iraq and Kuwait in accordance with constitutional and legal contexts and respecting the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions".

According to the judicial council's statement, Zaidan emphasized "the depth of relationship between the two brotherly peoples and Iraq's appreciation for Kuwait honorable stance in helping Iraq get rid of the dictatorial regime". However, the statement did not address the judicial decision issued by the Iraqi federal court, which invalidated the Khor Abdullah agreement between Iraq and Kuwait.

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 833 in 1993, which determined the land border between Iraq and Kuwait. However, the delineation of the maritime border was left to the two countries. After the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Iraq and Kuwait in 2003, negotiations began to determine their maritime border. In this context, an agreement regulating navigation in the Khor Abdullah region was signed in 2012 and approved by Iraq in 2013. — KUNA

Analysis Wing (RAW), India's foreign intelligence agency. India responded by summoning Canada's High Commissioner to the foreign ministry on Tuesday before announcing a reciprocal expulsion of an unnamed top Canadian diplomat. That decision reflected the "growing concern at the interference of Canadian diplomats in our internal matters and their involvement in anti-India activities", the ministry said. The Canadian High Commission in New Delhi declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

Tensions between India and Canada have been simmering over the unsolved slaying, and Indian unhappiness over how Ottawa has handled Sikh separatists. Jocelyn Coulon, a former adviser to Trudeau who is now an independent researcher, said Canada's accusation would have "the effect of a bomb around the world".

Trudeau was in New Delhi last week for the G20 summit and met privately with his Indian counterpart but his visit was a testament to the strained

Azerbaijan launches Karabakh operation...

Continued from Page 1

Pashinyan in a televised address on Tuesday accused Azerbaijan of engaging in "ethnic cleansing of Karabakh Armenians". But he said the Armenian army was not involved in the fighting and the situation on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan was "stable". He urged Russia and the UN to "take steps" and spoke on the phone to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and French President Emmanuel Macron. "Both sides emphasized the inadmissibility of using force," press secretary Nazeli Bagdasaryan said in statements about both calls.

In the Armenian capital Yerevan, hundreds of people gathered outside the government building, calling on Pashinyan to resign over the crisis. Pashinyan responded to the protest in his televised comments, saying: "We must not allow certain people, certain forces to deal a blow to the Armenian state. There are already calls, coming from different places, to stage a coup in Armenia."

Armenia's foreign ministry condemned Azerbaijan's "aggression" against Karabakh. "On September 19, Azerbaijan unleashed another large-scale aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, aiming to complete its policy of ethnic cleansing," the foreign ministry said. It said Russian peacekeepers stationed in the region should "take clear and

ties between their countries. Modi expressed "strong concerns about continuing anti-India activities of extremist elements in Canada" during a meeting with Trudeau, according to an Indian government statement.

India has often complained about activities of the Sikh diaspora abroad, particularly in Canada, which New Delhi believes could revive a Sikh separatist movement. The Indian state of Punjab, which is 58 percent Sikh and 39 percent Hindu, was rocked by a violent separatist movement in the 1980s and early 1990s, in which thousands died. Canada also recently suspended negotiations for a free-trade agreement with India. Trudeau later told the media that Canada would always defend "freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom of peaceful protest" while acting against hatred.

The White House said Tuesday it was "deeply concerned" by the Canadian allegations. "We are deeply concerned about the allegations ref-

unequivocal steps to stop Azerbaijan's aggression".

But Azerbaijan justified the mission, citing "systematic" shelling by Armenian-backed forces and accusing them of carrying out "reconnaissance activities" and fortifying defensive positions. "There is also the strengthening of combat positions with personnel, armored vehicles, artillery and other weapons," Azerbaijan said, accusing separatists of "a high level of combat readiness".

Regional power brokers Russia and Turkey, which oversee a fragile peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, had been informed about Azerbaijan's military activities in Karabakh, Baku said. Turkey called the operation "necessary" and urged "comprehensive negotiations" over the crisis. Russian peacekeepers patrolling the region called for an immediate ceasefire, and said they had organized civilian evacuations.

Moscow's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said it was given "minutes" notice of the start of Azerbaijan's operation. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was "concerned" over the "sharp escalation" in Karabakh and was working to get the two countries to negotiate.

The fighting came just hours after Azerbaijan said four police officers and two civilians were killed in mine blasts in Nagorno-Karabakh, with authorities blaming separatists. The deaths at dawn came after Armenian separatists said they had reached an agreement with Azerbaijani authorities to resume aid deliveries to Karabakh. Baku's security services said two civilians had died in the district of Khojavend and four police officers were killed in another mine explosion en route to the site. — AFP

Canada, India spar over killing...

Continued from Page 1

of northern India and perhaps part of Pakistan. India has long claimed that Nijjar was involved in violent attacks on its soil, including a 2007 bombing that killed six people in the city of Ludhiana. Trudeau made the allegation public before an emergency session of parliament, calling in the "strongest possible terms" for the Indian government to cooperate in clearing up the matter. "The involvement of any foreign government in the murder of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil is an unacceptable violation of our sovereignty," he said.

Foreign Minister Melanie Joly then announced the expulsion of the local head of the Research and

enced by Prime Minister Trudeau," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement. "We remain in regular contact with our Canadian partners. It is critical that Canada's investigation proceed and the perpetrators be brought to justice."

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said Tuesday his government backs a Canadian investigation to determine whether India was involved in the killing. Cleverly, who is in New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly, told AFP he had met with Trudeau on Monday and discussed the case. "I think it's incredibly important that we allow the Canadian authorities to conduct their investigation," said Cleverly, adding it would be "unhelpful" to speculate on their outcome. "Obviously, we have a very strong relationship with Canada, a very strong relationship with India," he continued, adding he expected "full cooperation" by India in the probe. — AFP

International



ASNI: Students sing the Moroccan national anthem during an assembly outside classroom tents at a makeshift school on Sept 18, 2023. — AFP photos



Students attend class in a tent at a makeshift school in the earthquake-hit village of Asni.

Children trek to makeshift tent school in quake-hit Morocco

Students press on despite emotional scars

ASNI: In the earthquake-hit mountains of Morocco, 13-year-old Abdessamad El Berd gets up before dawn to make the long trek to the tent city that is his new school, walking by torchlight and careful to avoid roaming dogs. His father accompanies him on the 14-kilometer (nine-mile) walk from their remote village of Tinghar to the makeshift school set up in the small town of Asni, in the disaster-hit area south of Marrakech. "I don't want him to drop out of school, but it's tough," said the 45-year-old father, Brahim El Berd. "I don't know if he can keep up this pace," the man said, voicing hope that school buses will soon be organized. "Otherwise, we won't make it."

Morocco's education ministry has set up 32 traditional tents at Asni that serve as a school for 2,800 middle and high school students. Classes have not yet officially resumed since the 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck the region on Sept 8, killing nearly 3,000

people. But many children are already flocking to the tent school, where teachers provide a distraction and badly-needed psychological support to the children, many of whom have lost family members. "I don't feel very well," said one pupil, Khadija Ait Ali, 17. "But the fact that I'm back at school, even if in a tent, surrounded by my friends, is a relief. "I don't like being alone anymore because all I think about is the earthquake."

Psychological support

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has said the quake impacted around one million school children. It damaged or destroyed 530 schools and 55 boarding facilities, and classes were suspended in about 40 municipalities in the Al-Haouz, Chichaoua and Taroudant provinces.

At the makeshift school, French language teacher Abdellah Zahid, 32, said that, until classes resume, the

main goal is to support the children. "We are focusing on listening to our students and providing them with psychological support," Zahid told AFP. Despite the shared trauma, he voiced hope of "making this challenging school year a success".

Another pupil, 15-year-old Samira Ait Achichaou, had also set off at dawn with her father, hitchhiking more than 40 kilometers from her village of Oussert-erk. "It's tough, but I'm glad to be back on track with school," she said. Others pupils said they are struggling with emotional scars that run deep.

Tormented by distress

Amina Ait Abdellah, 16, said she "doesn't feel ready to resume classes" yet. "I still haven't come to terms with the tragedy we experienced," said Amina, from the village of Ouirgane, 14 kilometers southwest of Asni. "I can't stop thinking about the house we lost. I

can't stand the tents either," she said, surrounded by friends who agreed with her. "They remind me of the earthquake and its miseries."

One mother, Hasna Lahdadi, said her 11-year-old son Yahia was among the children still tormented by acute distress. "I try to do my best to help him express his anxieties," she said. "He's very afraid of aftershocks. Our house suffered serious damage." She tried to persuade him to switch to a school in Marrakech, but he refused. "I want to stay with my friends," said Yahia. "I'm happy to see them again."

Some of the children have lost almost everything, and school has become their refuge. Jamal Ait Hmane, 43, was taking his 13-year-old daughter to school, all the way from the town of Tamgounsi, about 100 kilometers away. "I want them to continue their education," he said. "It will help them forget the tragedy of the earthquake." — AFP



QUEZON: Environmental activists Jhed Tamano (left) and Jonila Castro gesture to media representatives at the Commission of Human Rights on Sept 19, 2023. — AFP

Philippines activists freed after alleged military abduction

MANILA: Two environmental activists allegedly abducted by the Philippine military more than two weeks ago were freed Tuesday, sparking jubilation among supporters who had campaigned for their release. Jonila Castro, 21, and Jhed Tamano, 22, had been working with coastal communities opposed to reclamation activities in Manila Bay when they disappeared on Sept 2 in Bataan province, near the capital Manila.

The Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for land and environmental defenders, with 11 killed in 2022, according to watchdog Global Witness. The women were released Tuesday hours after appearing at a government press conference where they went off script and accused the military of abduction — charges the authorities have repeatedly denied.

Rights groups previously alleged the women had been violently abducted, possibly by "state actors", apparently in relation to their activism. "We proved, because of what happened, that what we are fighting for is correct," a defiant Castro told reporters and activists after being freed. Tamano, who was standing next to Castro, called for "the resurfacing of other victims of forced disappearances". On Sept 15, nearly two weeks after the pair's disappearance, the National Security Council (NSC) and police announced at a news conference that Castro and Tamano were being held in a safe house after they sought help from authorities. They denied the women were activists and said allegations by "leftist organizations" that they had been abducted was "fake news" and an "elaborate hoax". "They were portrayed as environmentalists. They are not environmentalists but leftist organizers. They left the movement of their own free will," NSC spokesman Jonathan Malaya told reporters at the time.

'Lies and hogwash'

On Tuesday, however, Castro and Tamano offered a different version of events at a news conference hosted by the government's National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, which was set up by former president Rodrigo Duterte. The task force has frequently accused government critics of being communist sympathizers, without providing any evidence.

The practice, known as "red-tagging", can result in the arrest, detention or even death of the person targeted. It has continued under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, who succeeded Duterte in 2022. "The truth is we were abducted by the military via a van," Castro told the news conference at the Plaridel Municipal Hall in Bulacan province. "We were obliged to surrender because they threatened to kill us. That's the truth. We did not want to be in the custody of the military," Castro said the statement they signed was "not true". — AFP

Indian govt moves women quota bill in new parliament

NEW DELHI: Indian lawmakers have moved a bill to reserve one-third of seats in the lower house of parliament and state legislative assemblies for women. If passed, the proposed law would dramatically lift the number of women in parliament. Just 104 of India's 788 MPs were women after the last national election, according to government figures — a little over 13 percent.

India's lower house introduced the bill during its first session in the county's new parliament on Tuesday. The triangular building that will now seat nearly 800 representatives from across India is the centerpiece of a remodeling of the heart of New Delhi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The lawmakers walked to the new building Tuesday to symbolize the legislature's departure from its former home in chambers built during British rule. Modi's Hindu-nationalist government called a special session to match the relocation, which coincides with the beginning of a festival celebrating the elephant-headed deity Ganesha.



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph taken on Sept 19, 2023 shows India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center) meeting MPs at the Central Hall of the Old Parliament building in New Delhi. — AFP

1,000 London police officers taken off streets

LONDON: Around 1,000 police officers have been suspended or put on restricted duties as part of a drive to clean up London's scandal-hit Metropolitan police force, a police chief said on Tuesday. The country's biggest force has been hit by a string of scandals that have undermined confidence in British policing. They include the rape and murder of a young woman snatched off the street by a serving officer.

According to the Met, of the force's 34,000 officers, 201 are currently suspended and about 860 are on restricted duties. Met Police deputy assistant commissioner Stuart Cundy said the drive to turn the force around was likely to take "one, two, or more years". Around 60 officers could now face the sack each month for at least the next two years due to ongoing miscon-

The government has worked to rid the Indian capital of the vestiges of the colonial era, which itself saw a wholesale transformation of the megacity by British planners at the beginning of the last century. "Today India has awakened with a new consciousness," Modi said in the central hall of the old parliament building before leading fellow legislators by foot across to the new complex.

India's parliament has grown considerably over the decades, with more than 100 additional lawmakers in total across both houses since its first post-independence elections in 1952. The new, larger building has extra room to accommodate parliament's expanded ranks along with updated technology.

It stands next to the ageing and cramped colonial-era building from where India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru made his landmark "trust with destiny" speech to signal the beginning of the country's independence in 1947. Modi has stressed in public speeches the need for India to abandon traces of a "colonial mindset". His government has worked to excise traces of the British era from the country's urban landscape. The new parliament is part of a broader renovation of New Delhi's main political precinct. The government has yet to specify its plans for the old assembly, but media reports have suggested that parts of the complex will be used as archives and a museum. — AFP

Entire 'Tree of Life' branches going extinct: Scientists

WASHINGTON: Humans are driving the loss of entire branches of the "Tree of Life," according to a new study published on Monday which warns of the threat of a sixth mass extinction. "The extinction crisis is as bad as the climate change crisis. It is not recognized," said Gerardo Ceballos, professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and co-author of the study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). "What is at stake is the future of mankind," he told AFP.

The study is unique because instead of merely examining the loss of a species, it examines the extinction of entire genera. In the classification of living beings, the genus lies between the rank of species and that of family. For example, dogs are a species belonging to the genus canis — itself in the canid family. "It is a really significant contribution. I think the first time anyone has attempted to assess modern extinction rates at a level above the species," Robert Cowie, a biologist at the University of Hawaii who was not involved in the study, told AFP.

"As such it really demonstrates the loss of entire branches of the Tree of Life," a representation of living things first developed by Charles Darwin. The study shows that "we aren't just trimming terminal twigs, but rather are taking a chainsaw to get rid of big branches," agreed Anthony Barnosky, professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley.

73 extinct genera

The researchers relied largely on species listed as extinct by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). They focused on vertebrate species (excluding fish), for which more data is available. Of some 5,400 genera (comprising 34,600 species), they concluded that 73 had become extinct in the last 500 years — most of them in the last two centuries. The researchers then compared this with the extinction rate estimated from the fossil record over the very long term. "Based on the extinction rate in the previous million years we would have expected to lose two genera. But we lost 73," explained Ceballos. That should have taken 18,000 years, not 500, the study estimated — though such estimates remain uncertain, as not all species are known and the fossil record remains incomplete.

The cause? Human activities, such as the destruction of habitats for crops or infrastructure, as well as overfishing, hunting and so on. The loss of one genus can have consequences for an entire ecosystem, argued Ceballos. "If you take one brick, the wall won't collapse, he said. "You take many more, eventually the wall will collapse. "Our worry is that ... we're losing things so fast, that for us it signals the collapse of civilization."

'Still time' to act

All experts agree that the current rate of extinction is alarming — but whether this represents the start of a sixth mass extinction (the last being the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs 66 million years ago) remains a matter of debate. Scientists broadly define a mass extinction as the loss of 75 percent of species over a short period of time. Using that "arbitrary" definition, Cowie said, a sixth mass extinction has not yet occurred. But if we assume that "species will continue to go extinct at the current rate (or faster), then it will happen," he warned. "We can surely say that this is the beginning of a potential sixth mass extinction." — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2023

OECD sees 'sub-par' global growth as high rates bite

World economy now expected to grow 3.0% this year

PARIS: The OECD raised its global economic outlook for 2023 on Tuesday but cut the growth forecast for next year as "painful" interest-rate hikes aimed at curbing inflation take their toll. The world economy is now expected to grow 3.0 percent this year, up from the 2.7 percent forecast in the June outlook of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

But it said global growth was projected to remain "sub-par", slowing to 2.7 percent next year—down from 2.9 percent in the previous forecast. "After a stronger-than-expected start to 2023, helped by lower energy prices and the reopening of China, global growth is expected to moderate," the OECD said in its report.

"The impact of tighter monetary policy is becoming increasingly visible, business and consumer confidence have turned down, and the rebound in China has faded," it added. Central banks worldwide have sharply increased borrowing costs in an effort to tame consumer prices which soared in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.

"We are all seeing the tightening of monetary policy working its way through our economies. This is necessary to reduce inflation, but it is painful," OECD chief economist Clare Lombardelli said at a press conference. The European Central Bank raised a key interest rate to a record high last week but hinted this might be its last hike, while the US Federal Reserve is expected to pause its own campaign on Wednesday.

"Inflation is projected to moderate gradually over 2023 and 2024 but to remain above central bank objectives in most economies," the OECD said.

Rising credit card delinquencies

Inflation remains well above the two-percent targets of the Fed and ECB, and oil prices have rebounded in recent weeks. EU data on Tuesday showed eurozone inflation slowed slightly to 5.2 percent in August from 5.3 percent the previous month.

The Bank of England and its peers in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland are also making interest rate decisions on Thursday.

"Even if policy rates are not raised further, the effects of past rises will continue to work their way through economies for some time," the OECD said. Borrowing costs for companies and households have risen, while credit conditions have tightened, it said.

"Some countries are already seeing rising loan and credit card delinquency rates and increases in corporate insolvencies," the OECD said. The crisis at regional US banks in March and the fire sale of European banking giant Credit Suisse show that "risks remain" that higher rates could "produce stresses in the financial system", the report warned.

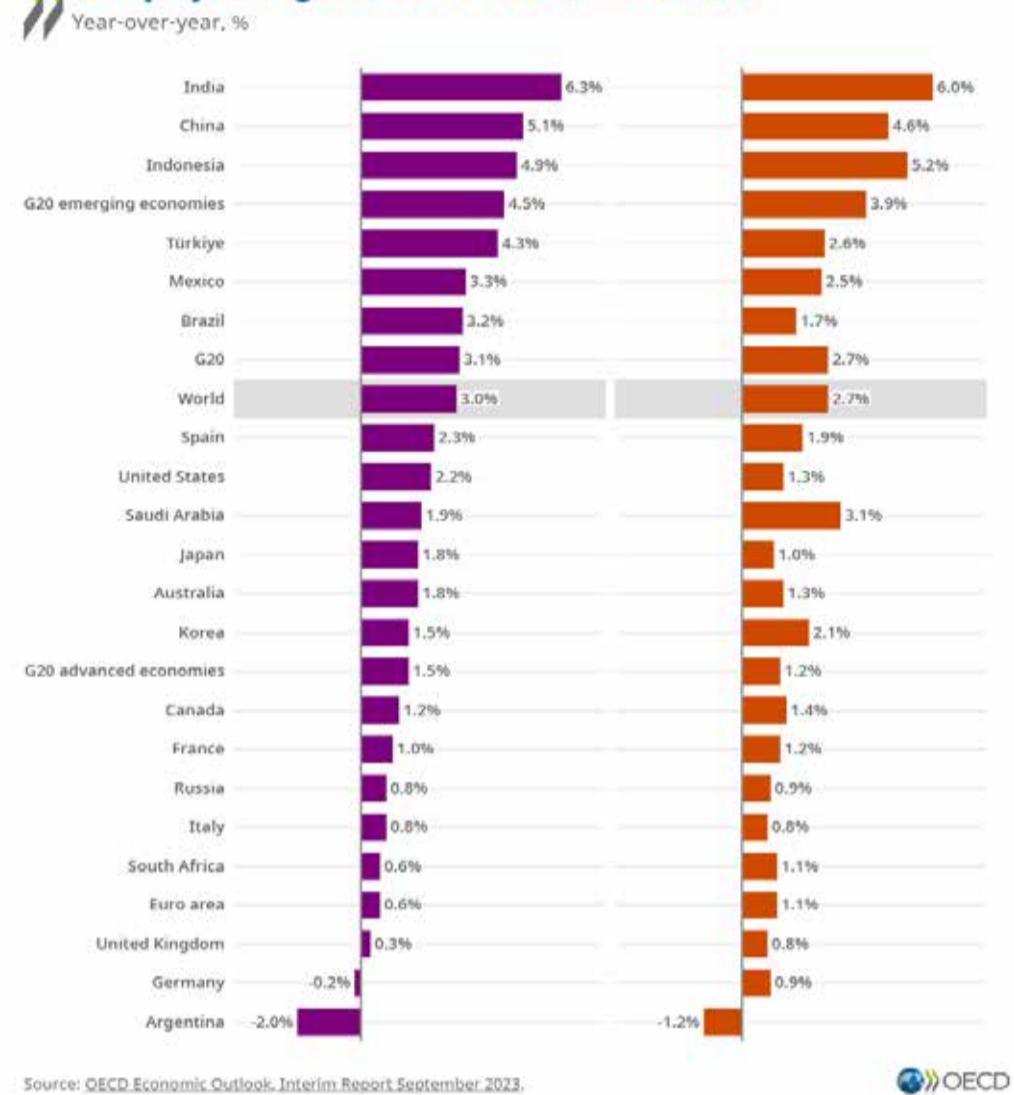
China risk

The OECD also warned that "a sharper-than-expected slowdown in China is an additional key risk that would hit output growth around the world". The world's second biggest economy has struggled this year after three years of COVID restrictions and massive debt in the property sector.

The OECD cut its outlook for China, with growth of 5.1 percent this year. It will slow to 4.6 percent in 2024, 0.5 percentage points lower than previously forecast. While it raised its forecast for the world's biggest economy, the United States, the OECD noted that US growth would slow from 2.2 percent in 2023 to 1.3 percent next year.

Although the US economy "has so far proved unexpectedly resilient to the steep rise in policy interest rates", the effects of tighter financial conditions "are expected to become increasingly visible", the OECD said. The organization lowered its forecasts for the eurozone, with growth of 0.6 percent this year and 1.1 percent in 2024 as the German economy struggles. Japan's growth outlook was raised by 0.5 percentage points to 1.8 percent for 2023 but lowered by 0.1 points to 1.0 percent for 2024. — AFP

GDP projected growth rates for 2023 and 2024



Oil jumps above \$95 amid tight supplies, robust demand

LONDON: Oil prices jumped towards \$100 on Tuesday pushing the stock markets to move in different directions amid fuelling worries about persistently-high inflation. Brent North Sea crude oil traded above \$95 per barrel Tuesday for the first time since November last year, supported by tight supplies and robust demand. "When central banks are starting to see the light at the end of the inflation tunnel, \$100-plus oil will be incredibly unwelcome and unhelpful," noted Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA trading group.

The Federal Reserve is seen keeping interest rates on hold Wednesday but is expected to be cautious over the outlook as crude pushes higher. The Bank of England and Bank of Japan also announce monetary policy decisions this week, along with peers in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. "In a classic case of calm before the storm, investors have seemingly taken a wait-and-see mode ahead of the Fed, BoE and BoJ meetings," said Rodrigo Catril at National Australia Bank.

In Asian trading, Hong Kong managed a gain while Shanghai was flat. In Europe, London and Paris were in the green while Frankfurt was lower. Wall Street's main indices opened lower at the start of trading, with rising bond yields and energy prices weighing on sentiment.

"Those moves have been deterrents for investors worried about their implications for growth and spending, which are interconnected," said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development on Tuesday raised its global economic outlook for 2023 but cut the growth forecast for next year as "painful" interest-rate hikes aimed at curbing inflation take their toll.

The world economy is expected to grow 3.0 percent this year, up from the 2.7 percent forecast in the June outlook of the OECD. Official data Tuesday showed eurozone inflation slowed slightly in August. Consumer prices in the 20-country single currency area fell to 5.2 percent in August from 5.3 percent in July, according to Eurostat.—AFP

Solar panels go into service near North Pole

KAPP LINNE, Norway: Norway has installed solar panels in its Svalbard archipelago, a region plunged in round-the-clock darkness all winter, in a pilot project that could help remote Arctic communities transition to green energy.

Neatly lined up in six rows in a field, 360 solar panels will on Thursday begin providing electricity to an old shipping radio station, Isfjord Radio, now converted into a base camp for tourists. The wind-swept archipelago—also known as Spitsbergen—is located some 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) from the North Pole and is accessible only by boat or helicopter, weather-permitting. "It's what we believe to be the world's northernmost ground-mounted PV (photovoltaic) system," Mons Ole Sellevold, renewable energies technical adviser at state-owned energy group Store Norske, told AFP.

"It's the first time anyone has done it at this scale in the Arctic," he said, his rifle slung over his shoulder in case polar bears turn up, a not uncommon occurrence at these latitudes. Another 100 solar panels are positioned on the roof of the radio station—which has until now run on diesel generators—and should cover about half of the site's electricity needs and cut

its CO2 emissions. In summer, the region is bathed in an abundance of sunlight, with a "midnight sun" that never sets.

The solar panels also benefit from the "albedo" effect, the reflective power of snow and ice, as well as low temperatures that improve their efficiency. Conversely, in winter, the region is plunged in total darkness from early October until mid-February, which makes it impossible for Isfjord Radio to completely give up fossil fuels. Store Norske is therefore also considering other alternatives, such as wind farms, to further the station's green transition.

'Test site'

The move is motivated by environmental considerations as well as economic factors, with diesel costly to buy and transport, while solar panels are also easy to maintain and do not break down, Sellevold said. The aim is also to use the installation as a pilot project to see if the technology can be used by some 1,500 other sites or communities in the Arctic that are not hooked up to traditional electricity grids and also need to transition to green energy, he said.

"We want to make Isfjord Radio a test site to ... get an Arctic-proven technology that we can afterwards take to other locations like this," he said. According to a study published last year, the Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the rest of the planet over the past 40 years, causing ice to melt faster and disrupting ecosystems. This has affected both local populations and the rest of the world, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events.—AFP



ISFJORD RADIO, Norway: This aerial picture taken on Sept 14, 2023, shows 360 solar panels in Kapp Linné, in the Norwegian arctic island of Svalbard. — AFP

Musk considers charging all X users monthly fee

PARIS: Elon Musk has sparked outrage among fans of his social media platform X by suggesting he might introduce a monthly fee for all users, in what would be the biggest shake-up since he took over the site then known as Twitter last October. During a talk with Zio-inist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, Musk said that introducing a small monthly payment for X would combat the "armies of bots" on the site. Musk bought Twitter for \$44 billion but has since admitted its value has plunged after he gutted its workforce and allowed right-wing conspiracy theorists back on the site, sending advertisers fleeing.

X users united in dismay at his latest plan, suggesting it could finally put an end to the site, and analysts questioned the logic of a move that would make the platform even less appealing to advertisers.

Musk said in July the platform had lost roughly half its advertising revenue, though he has also claimed that almost all advertisers had returned. Bots—accounts run by computer programs rather than humans—are common on X, where they can be used to amplify political messages or racial hatred.

Netanyahu asked Musk about anti-Semitism, and how X could "prevent the use of bots—armies of bots—to replicate and amplify it". Musk replied that the company was "moving to having a small monthly payment for use of the X system".

"It's the only way I can think of to combat vast armies of bots," he said, explaining that even a small fee would make it expensive to run bots.

'Network effect'

The conversation, which was broadcast on X, came as the Tesla tycoon is mired in a row with the Anti-Defamation League, a US-based Jewish organization. Musk has threatened to sue the ADL for making unfounded accusations of anti-Semitism that have scared away advertisers and hurt his company's revenue. Musk has long been accused of promoting anti-Semitic tropes.

Just a day before meeting Netanyahu, Musk responded to a post blaming Jewish billionaire George Soros for encouraging immigration to Europe, saying: "The Soros organization appears to want nothing less than the destruction of western civilization." His move to make users pay sparked thousands of critical messages and memes on Tuesday. "RIP X/Twitter! It's been REAL and it's been FUN but since you took over, it ain't been REAL FUN," a user called Jesi T wrote.

James Cooper, director of the Business of Apps agency, said introducing a blanket payroll would crush the "network effect" of having millions of people interacting on the site, one of its biggest appeals for both advertisers and users. "Universal charging for the service would decimate the user base and therefore destroy the value in the network and the reason to take part in the platform as a contributor," he said. — AFP

Business

The path to net zero: World Petroleum Congress kicks off

Saudi Arabia to host 15th edition of WPC in 2026

CALGARY, Canada: Hundreds of executives and government officials from oil-producing nations around the world have gathered in Calgary against the backdrop of growing global pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 24th World Petroleum Congress, one of the largest oil-and-gas conferences in the world, commenced on Monday and concludes on Thursday. The theme of the gathering this year is Energy Transition: The Path to Net Zero. The event, which has not been held in Canada since 2000, will count among its attendees heavyweights such as Exxon Mobil CEO Darren Woods, Repsol CEO Josu Imaz and Amin Nasser, the CEO of Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil company. The congress, which occurs every three years, is taking place at a time when the issue of global energy security remains heightened in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In addition, Saudi Arabia and Russia recently agreed to extend their voluntary oil production cuts through the end of this year, sending commodity prices higher. Last week, the US benchmark crude price West Texas Intermediate topped \$90 per barrel for the first time since late last year. But the executives meeting in Calgary are also gathering after what scientists say was the hottest summer on record - a summer marred by climate change-fueled wildfires and floods around the world.

Many of the companies in attendance at the congress have been criticized by environmentalists for prioritizing profits over the planet. The energy transition, and the need for the oil and gas sector to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in the decades to come, is the theme of this year's event.

The World Petroleum Congress is led by WPC Energy, which is an organization of nearly 65-member countries from around the world, including both OPEC and Non-OPEC countries. Saudi Arabia will be hosting the 25th edition of the World Petroleum Congress after the organizational committee of the Congress accepted the country's bid to be the venue for the event. The formal announcement was made on the sidelines of the Youth Forum that World Petroleum Council (WPC) organized in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The conference comes as the earth has sweltered through its hottest summer ever measured in Calgary and Edmonton. And the many days filled with wildfire haze has made this the smokiest summer on record. The Chair of the World Petroleum Council in Canada said they would be discussing what companies and countries are doing to help move towards the goal of decarbonizing existing production of oil and gas.

"We will look at carbon capture and storage. We will look to hydrogen, methane reduction, those types of technologies. But many of the companies have since expanded into other business segments, including wind and solar, and those types of things and they're looking at a comprehensive energy system," said Richard Masson, World Petroleum Council, Canada chair. Masson said they will be having a broad dialogue about what the energy transition means on a global basis.

"Many of the companies and countries are in the developing world where the challenges are different and greater because they don't have adequate energy and affordable prices for their people yet, so



CALGARY: (Left to right) Joseph McMonigle, Secretary General of International Energy Forum, Amin Nasser, CEO of Saudi Aramco, Hou Qijun, President of China National Petroleum Corp and Darren Woods, CEO of ExxonMobil, take part in a panel discussion at the World Petroleum Congress in Calgary on Monday.

we're going to talk about that big picture, too, because we often think about it from a western point of view where we can just buy an electric car and we will be better off. That isn't possible in much of the world," Masson said.

President and CEO of the 24th World Petroleum Congress Denis Painchaud said on Sunday that the

industry has come together to recognize and to appreciate that we are all in this together and that we all need to tackle climate change. "It's real it's happening and so what can the industry do to address its contributions to climate change." He said that transition was not something people talked about in 2000 when the WPC was last held in Calgary. — Agencies



WASHINGTON: The US labor market is remarkably solid despite aggressive interest rate hikes to fight inflation and a recent rise in unemployment, but analysts warn that the central bank risks pushing too far.

US jobs market solid but Fed risks pushing too far

WASHINGTON: The US labor market is remarkably solid despite aggressive interest rate hikes to fight inflation and a recent rise in unemployment, but analysts warn that the central bank risks pushing too far.

The Federal Reserve has lifted the benchmark lending rate 11 times since March last year, with consumer inflation cooling from a peak of 9.1 percent in mid-2022 to below four percent. And Fed officials are gathering Tuesday for a two-day meeting that could see them raise rates again to lower inflation sustainably back to a two percent target - potentially adding pressure on employment - or hold them at current levels.

Healthy market

The Fed has a dual mandate that involves promoting stable prices and maximum employment, and walks a tightrope between lifting rates to cool the economy while averting a damaging labor market downturn. While a rise in interest rates typically comes with an uptick in joblessness as borrowing becomes more expensive, unemployment has held at historically low levels below four percent since early 2022. And job creation is relatively high, said Moody's Investors Service senior vice president Madhavi Bokil.

"Usually when (the) unemployment rate is so low, we don't get repeatedly 200,000-plus jobs," she said, referring to the hiring pace until May this year. At 80.9 percent, the figure is higher than it was pre-pandemic, above the level right before the Great Recession around 2008, and just slightly below the record level in 2000. "I think that is showing a lot of strength," she said. While in general falling inflation is linked to rising unemployment, Bokil noted that a key factor in recent years was how households came out of the pandemic in a better economic position than before - between forced savings and government support.

Longer lag

The effects of monetary policy are linked to credit, and higher interest rates raise borrowing costs, Bokil added. Given that this in turn affects new borrowers or those trying to refinance their loans, "it's not surprising" to see a bigger lag between policy moves and effects on the economy. "Because of the better balance sheets of firms, large ones especially, and households, we know there is going to be a larger lag in term of impact," she said. While US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen acknowledged in a CNBC interview on Monday that there are lags in the impact of monetary policy on the economy, "we still have a good healthy labor market," she said. — AFP

Yellen: Premature to predict hit from auto strike

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Monday it is too early to gauge the economic impact from an ongoing, historic strike at three top car manufacturers. "It's premature to be making forecasts about what it means for the economy," she said in an interview on CNBC, adding that this depends on how long the strike lasts and who is affected by it. Her comments came as the "Big Three" automakers - General Motors, Ford and Stellantis - were hit Friday by a limited strike after a failed push to produce an agreement with the United Auto Workers union.

The UAW is calling for better conditions across the board for workers, including a 40 percent pay raise over the next four-year contract. The group's chief warned Sunday that the strike could expand if companies do not raise their wage offers in current negotiations. "We want to see the two sides come to a win-win agreement," Yellen said on Monday. "President (Joe) Biden has made clear he expects them to work hard to negotiate 24/7 to get to a solution. And so we're hoping that that will happen soon," she added. Asked about the US economy after multiple Federal Reserve interest rate hikes, Yellen said: "I don't see any signs that the economy is at risk of a downturn."

She noted that the United States continues to have a healthy labor market while consumer spending remains "quite robust" - all while inflation is cooling. Officials are also monitoring gasoline prices after a surge in August, Yellen said, noting that the expectation is for energy prices to stabilize.

On concerns of a looming US government shutdown at the end of this month, Yellen stressed "there's absolutely no reason for a shutdown." EY chief economist Gregory Daco estimated Monday that each week of a shutdown will cost the US economy \$6

billion, weighing on fourth quarter growth. Yellen said: "The Senate Republicans, the Democrats in both the House and Senate, stand ready to enact appropriations bills that are consistent with the bipartisan agreement that was reached to lift the debt ceiling." "We want Congress to do its work of funding the government and keeping it open," she added.

Meanwhile, negotiations continued Monday, the fourth day of the United Auto Workers' strike of Ford, General Motors and Jeep maker Stellantis employees, with public statements on both sides indicating they remain far apart. Late Monday, the UAW set a Friday deadline for the companies to make significant headway on talks. "If we don't make serious progress by noon on Friday, September 22nd, more locals will be called on to Stand Up and join the strike," said UAW President Shawn Fain. Fain had told MSNBC Monday morning that the two sides remained "far apart." Industry watchers have said the strike could drag on for weeks or more, in part because the costs to both sides thus far have been limited.

Rather than completely shutter production at one or all of the Big Three, the UAW launched a limited strike, taking down just one plant at each company. The targeted strike tactic "doesn't put as much immediate pressure on any one company, but it creates uncertainty," said Harry Katz, a professor at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, who thinks the stoppage could go six or eight weeks or longer. The three plants taken down produce mid-sized pickup trucks that are profitable, but not the biggest cash cows, meaning the dramatic action has not inflicted maximum pain on company profitability - yet. "The union has given themselves the ability to escalate and hit facilities that are even more harmful," said Michelle Kaminski, a professor at Michigan State University who specializes in labor relations.

The lost sales will result in an impact of between \$41 million and \$64 million in weekly operating profits, according to a note from Deutsche Bank. From the union's standpoint, the three plants employ about 12,700 workers, fewer than 10 percent of UAW auto workers nationwide. — AFP



DETROIT: Members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union march through the streets of downtown Detroit following a rally on the first day of the UAW strike in Detroit. — AFP

Oman's OQ Gas set to raise up to \$771m in IPO

MUSCAT: Oman's OQ Gas Networks, the pipeline business of state oil company OQ, aims to raise up to 297 million Omani riyals (\$771 million) from its initial public offering in what could be the country's largest listing. OQ set the price range for the IPO of OQGN at 131 baisas to 140 baisas per share, which would give the company a valuation of up to 606 million riyals (\$1.57 billion), according to a statement on the

Capital Market Authority's website on Sunday. The state-run company is selling about 2 billion shares, representing a 49 per cent stake in OQGN through Oman Energy Trading Company and Oman Oil Services Limited. Saudi Omani Investment Company, a unit of the Public Investment Fund, as well as Qatar Investment Authority subsidiary Falcon Investments and gas infrastructure company Fluxys Belgium, are each taking 10 per cent of the offer, OQGN said in a separate statement on Monday.

The offer is the "largest in the history of the Omani capital market in terms of volume and market value", the CMA statement said. The book-building period will run from September 26 until October 9 for institutional investors, while the retail offer is expected to close on October 5. — Agencies

Instacart sets IPO price at \$30 per share

NEW YORK: US grocery delivery startup Instacart said that it aims to raise at least \$660 million with a Tuesday stock market debut priced at \$30 per share. The share price was set at the high end of a range disclosed previously by the company, which plans to offer 22 million shares to be traded on the Nasdaq exchange under the symbol "CART," Instacart said in a release.

The price valued San Francisco-based Instacart at around \$10 billion - down from \$39 billion in 2021. In the event of strong demand, the number of shares could climb to 25.3 million, raising \$759 million for Instacart.

Founded in 2012, the venture capital backed startup saw its business soar early in the coronavirus pandemic as people avoided grocery stores due to the risks from COVID-19. The company's business went on to cool, however, leading to a cut to its workforce of shoppers. In recent years Instacart has put a focus on orders being ready for pickup at grocery stores instead of being dropped off at customers' doors. Rising interest rates have diminished the values of many startups and other high-risk investments. The tech industry at-large is weathering challenging economic conditions that have prompted layoffs and other cost-cutting measures.

Maplebear Inc, which does business as Instacart, filed to become a publicly traded company on August 25. It said in the filing that it had net income of \$242 million in the first half of this year. The company warned that it has a history of losses and "may be unable to sustain profitability or generate profitable growth in the future." — AFP

Top US official applauds Nigerian economic reforms

LAGOS: A senior US official on Monday applauded tough reforms taken by Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu since coming to office in May, saying they provided an opportunity for Africa's largest economy. Tinubu has ended a long-standing fuel subsidy that kept the price of petrol artificially low but cost the government billions of dollars and also freed up the naira currency.

Investors, trade partners and economists praised the measures as necessary for the long-term growth of the economy and to bring new investment into Africa's most populous country.

But government has urged patience from Nigerians feeling short-term austerity as fuel prices tripled, inflation has hit 25 percent and the naira devalued around 40 percent against the dollar.

Visiting Lagos on a trip to improve US-Nigeria economic ties, US Deputy Secretary for the Treasury Wally Adeyemo echoed praise for Tinubu's reform package at a "critical moment" for Nigeria.

"The opportunity has never been greater. Your government is pursuing difficult and bold reforms," he said in remarks to a Lagos business school. Adeyemo, the highest-ranking Nigerian-American official, was also due to meet US companies in Nigeria and tour a tech incubator in Lagos for startups.

He said Nigeria needed to stabilize the naira currency, and lauded "difficult steps" taken so far by the government. In June, Tinubu's administration abolished the country's multiple exchange rate system and floated the naira in a move long urged by World Bank and IMF economists. — AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Global growth under pressure despite easing inflation worries

With oil and food prices rising, early rate cuts seem unlikely

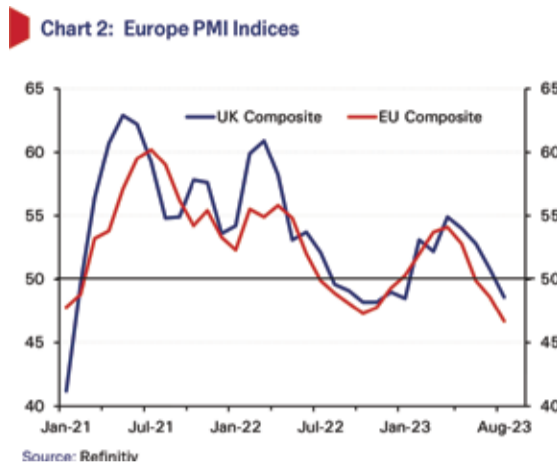
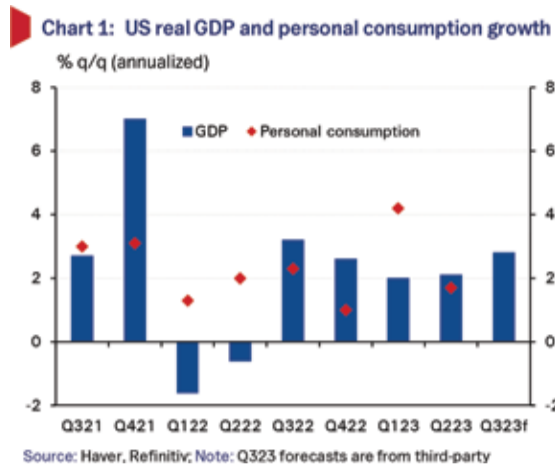


Table 1: Real GDP growth rate
% y/y

	2022	2023f	2024f
US	2.1	2.0	0.9
Eurozone	3.5	0.6	0.9
UK	4.1	0.3	0.5
Japan	1.0	1.8	0.9
China	3.0	5.0	4.5
India*	7.2	6.2	6.3

Source: Refinitiv (third-party forecasts) Note: * fiscal year ending March of the following year

KUWAIT: The global economy continues to hold up better than expected, with resilient consumer spending and still-tight labor markets helping growth in developed markets, especially the US, and severe recession fears waning. Inflation has receded from its highs, supporting consumer and business confidence, and bolstering expectations that aggressive policy tightening by major central banks is at or near its end. However, the recent climb in oil and global food prices, together with still well above-target underlying inflation rates in the US and Europe, are likely to rule out early rate cuts in 2024, which could add to growth headwinds there next year. Meanwhile, weak economic growth figures in China may have helped trigger firmer government policy support recently. If successful in boosting growth, this will have positive knock-on effects on European and Japanese exports though also risks pushing global inflation up.

The US economy has outperformed expectations, with GDP growth surprising positively and dissipating chances of recession this year. GDP growth accelerated slightly to 2.1 percent q/q (annualized) in Q2 2023 from 2 percent in Q1 on higher business investment and relatively robust household spending. The positive momentum has continued into Q3, with strong increases in industrial production and retail sales in July-August. Sales of new homes have also recovered, helped by a tight supply of existing single-family units. The ISM services activity index in August climbed to a solid 54.5, and even its manufacturing equivalent at 47.6 signaled a slower pace of contraction. The

consensus is for another strong GDP print of 2.8 percent in Q3, though growth in Q4 could be hit by the resumption of student debt repayments in October.

The tight job market remains at the core of the US economy's resilience. Although monthly job gains have eased from their unsustainable rates of last year, the unemployment rate at 3.8 percent is at near historic lows and real wage growth is now in positive territory. Unless we see widespread cracks in the labor market, consumer spending and the economic outlook should continue to hold up, offsetting the impact of higher interest rates.

Consumer price inflation remains on a broadly slowing path, with core CPI inflation still above target at 4.3 percent y/y in August but well off its 6.5 percent peak last year and further softening seen ahead as the lagged impact of earlier falls in shelter costs feeds through. With the Fed funds target interest rate now at 5.25-5.50 percent, real policy rates are in positive territory and the Fed is seen delivering perhaps one final 25bps rate hike in November. However, with the economy growing at or above its trend rate, wage growth still high, commodity prices rising again and some narrower measures of inflation remaining sticky, the Fed will be unable to declare victory over inflation very quickly and interest rate cuts are likely to be delayed until the second half of next year.

Europe's economy loses steam

Europe's economy is witnessing growing signs of weakness on a steep rise in policy rates and a fragile recovery in China.

The eurozone's services sector, which was outperforming manufacturing for a long period, has now also come under pressure with both sectors' PMIs coming below the 'no change' 50 mark in August. In Q2 2023, eurozone GDP grew just 0.1 percent q/q, following a similar rise in Q1. Moreover, a softening global outlook amid ongoing weakness in Chinese demand are likely to weigh on the region's exports. In September, the European Commission cut its growth outlook for the eurozone for 2023 (to 0.8 percent from 1.1 percent in the Spring) and 2024 (to 1.3 percent from 1.6 percent), as Germany slips into recession on a slump in manufacturing and exports. Meanwhile, having also escaped recession so far by a narrow margin, the UK economy faces a similarly soft outlook. GDP contracted 0.5 percent m/m in July versus +0.5 percent in June and could rise just 0.1 percent q/q in Q3 (+0.2 percent in Q2).

Japan's Q2 GDP growth

Japan's economy continues its struggle for a robust post-pandemic recovery amid a weaker yen and a softening global outlook. GDP growth in Q2 2023 was revised sharply lower in the final reading, albeit still high at an annualized 4.8 percent. This was a solid upgrade from Q1, but growth was solely driven by a strong performance in the external sector (helped by a recovery in inbound tourism) while domestic consumption and business investment were weak. Moreover, real wages continued to fall for the 16th consecutive month in July (-2.6 percent y/y), boding ill for underlying domestic demand.

In light of the mixed data, the Bank of Japan (BOJ) has reaffirmed its stance on maintaining an ultra-loose monetary policy. However, BoJ Governor Kazuo Ueda has hinted at shifting away from negative interest rates if the data by the year-end suggest that current high inflation (3.1 percent y/y in July) looks like being sustained. The BoJ had earlier tweaked its yield curve-control policy to allow up to 1 percent yields on 10-year government bonds from 0.5 percent earlier, but hasn't let yields to rise anywhere near this. As Japan is a net creditor to international markets, any repatriation of overseas funds due to higher rates could have a large impact on the global financial system. Ueda's signal on ending negative interest rates seems a step in preparing markets for a policy reversal sometime in 2024 rather than earlier. The signals may also have been aimed at stemming weakness in the yen, which is hovering close to 30-plus-year lows versus the US dollar.

China to ramp up support

Following an initial post-COVID rebound, economic momentum in China has slowed amid ongoing problems in the real estate sector, softer manufacturing activity, and declining exports. GDP growth slowed to just 0.8 percent q/q in Q2 2023 from 2.2 percent in Q1, though a base effect pushed growth up to 6.3 percent in year-on-year terms. Pressures on the real estate sector include falling home valuations that have hit homebuyer confidence, declining property investment, and rising liquidity and solvency risks for developers. Falling land prices have reduced local

government revenues and raised concerns about the ability of their financing vehicles to service debt, estimated by the IMF to stand at \$9 trillion (55 percent of GDP). The real estate slump has also heightened risks in the country's \$2.9 trillion shadow banking sector.

India's Q1 growth surges

India's GDP growth beat forecasts in Q1 FY23/24 (fiscal ending March) at 7.8 percent y/y versus 6.1 percent in Q4 FY22/23. A sharp recovery in private consumption growth and elevated investment spending provided impetus. The government has reiterated its forecast of around 6.5 percent growth for the current fiscal year and leading indicators, including recent PMI surveys, have been robust.

However, signs of fatigue are also emerging, with indirect tax collections exhibiting slowing growth in recent months. Moreover, monsoon rains have been erratic, impacting agricultural production and prompting authorities to control exports of main agri-commodities, including wheat, rice, and sugar. The effects have been felt both locally and overseas, with global food prices spiking. For example, following the ban, Asian white rice prices jumped by around 20 percent in early August. With a general election scheduled for next year, the government may announce other populist measures to support the rural sector, perhaps pushing government spending higher, despite its goal of narrowing the fiscal deficit to 5.9 percent of GDP this fiscal year from 6.4 percent last year.



Business lobbies warn working in China difficult

SHANGHAI: Foreign business confidence in China has reached its lowest in years, US and European enterprise lobbies warned on Tuesday, as slowing growth and geopolitical tensions hit investment prospects. There was a burst of consumer exuberance after China lifted its strict zero-COVID policies late last year.

But weak consumption, a crisis in the massive property sector and soft demand for China's exports has complicated the recovery. US firms in China now report "record-low" optimism and are increasingly looking to move investment away from the country, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Shanghai said. "2023 was supposed to be the year investor confidence and optimism bounced back after years of COVID disruptions and restrictions," AmCham said in a report released Tuesday.

"According to our 2023 survey of US businesses in China, however, the rebound has not materialized and business sentiment has continued to deteriorate," it added. A report released the same day by the Chamber of Commerce of the European Union expressed similar concerns. "European companies' perception of the Chinese market as predictable, reliable and efficient has been steadily eroded," the Chamber—which represents some 1,700 EU companies based in China—said. "For decades, European companies thrived in China," the Chamber's president Jens Eskelund said.

But, after three "turbulent" years, he said, "many have re-evaluated their basic assumptions about the Chinese market". At a separate media event on Tuesday in Beijing, the European Commission's digital chief said opaque Chinese laws were fuelling concerns among foreign firms in the country after holding talks with Chinese officials about critical areas such as AI and data governance.

Among the concerns Vera Jourova said she had heard about from European businesses in China was the "unpredictability of the decisions and interpretation of the laws by the regulators".

Foreign entrepreneurs have long complained about vague and arbitrary regulations in China—as well as preferential treatment afforded to local companies. And one in two European companies reported "obstacles" to their activities in China and 62 percent said they missed opportunities. "What kind of relationship does China want to have with foreign enterprises?" the Chamber asked. —AFP

NBK RESEARCH BRIEF

Kuwait: Oil market rally an upside risk to public finances

KUWAIT: A tighter oil market coupled with the recent OPEC voluntary supply cuts have pushed oil prices up considerably over the past three months, with Kuwait Export Crude under more than \$20 since end-June to a near one-year high of \$98.4/bbl. The higher oil prices, if sustained over coming months, will generate additional oil revenues of up to KD 1.2 billion over and above our initial estimate of KD 22.3 billion for the fiscal year ending March 2024. Consequently, this could narrow the deficit to KD 0.4 billion versus our previous estimate of a KD 1.6 billion shortfall. However, higher oil prices could encourage calls for higher spending, especially on welfare-related measures, which MPs have evidently continued to prioritize, potentially curbing the positive effects of higher oil proceeds.

Starbucks opens \$220m plant outside Shanghai

SHANGHAI: US coffee behemoth Starbucks opened a \$220 million development outside Shanghai on Tuesday, a sign established multinationals are still looking to China for growth despite its faltering post-COVID recovery.

A survey released Tuesday by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai reported optimism among US businesses in China was at a "record low", mainly blaming the sluggish economy and Washington-Beijing tensions. But Starbucks' "Coffee Innovation Park", which includes a roasting plant and distribution centre, is the largest investment the company has made in any

such project outside the United States, a news release said Tuesday.

"Starbucks' best days are ahead in China," a spokesperson for the company told AFP by email when asked to comment on business sentiment in the country. "As Starbucks' largest and fastest-growing international market, we will continue to deepen our investment and reinforce our unwavering long-term commitment to the China market," CEO Laxman Narasimhan was quoted as saying in the release.

Narasimhan visited China in May, when he met the mayor of Shanghai, according to state media.

His trip took place as other CEOs

Indeed, the IMF repeated yesterday its calls for policymakers to curb this traditional dynamic through implementation of medium-term fiscal rules, which would help make spending less sensitive to volatile oil prices.

UAE

The UAE's federal government issued a 10-year USD-denominated bond of \$1.5 billion with a yield of 4.917 percent, higher only by 60 bps than US treasuries with the same maturities. The bond will be listed on the London Stock Exchange and Nasdaq Dubai. The issuance reportedly attracted high quality investors—mainly by banks and fund managers within the Middle East and the US—and was oversubscribed by 5 times.

Oman

The long-awaited initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Network Company (OQGN), the sole operator of Oman's gas transportation system has set its offer range. The planned IPO aims to raise around OR 297 million (\$772 million) if priced at the top end of the range. The company plans to float about 2.12 billion shares, equivalent to up to 49 percent of

its share capital. The move follows similar trends in neighboring UAE and Saudi Arabia, and will be the biggest IPO in nearly two decades, part of Oman's ongoing efforts to encourage further diversification of its economy. The IPO subscription period is expected to begin later this month.

Egypt

The National Elections Authority is expected to announce the timeline of the presidential elections in the coming few days. The current presidential term ends on April 2, 2024 and according to a constitutional rule, the election process should start at least 120 days beforehand meaning early December 2023. The announcement by the National Election Authority will confirm this and announce further details regarding the process itself. Up to this point, only one candidate (ex parliament member Ahmed Tantawy) has showed interest in running for the presidency. As we have mentioned previously, having the elections take place as early as possible would allow the government to embark on key economic measures that are currently on hold due to social and political considerations.



of major multinational companies flocked to the world's second-largest economy to shore up business support post-COVID—including Apple, Tesla, JP Morgan and General Motors. Starbucks declined to give further details on the visit when asked.

The company has more than 6,500

coffee shops in more than 250 Chinese cities and says that a new store opens in the country every nine hours. The new Coffee Innovation Park has been built to serve the company's China stores exclusively, the company said, with some beans used coming from southern Yunnan province. —AFP

Country Garden wins approval to extend key bond

BEIJING: Chinese property giant Country Garden has won approval to extend repayments on a key local bond, a report said Tuesday, as the deeply indebted developer battles to avoid a potentially cat-

astrophic default. Two bondholders told Bloomberg News they had been briefed by an underwriter that the proposal to extend the 492 million yuan (\$67 million) note had been passed.

The sources requested anonymity in order to discuss a private matter, according to Bloomberg. A vote on the proposal had been extended three times, with the latest deadline falling at 10 pm (1400 GMT) on Monday. The approval means Country Garden has secured extensions this month on nine bonds with a combined principal of 14.7 billion yuan, the report said. The Hong Kong-listed firm is one of Chi-

na's biggest developers and its cashflow crisis has fanned fears that it could collapse with grave repercussions for the world's number two economy. China has long struggled with widespread debts in its construction and property sectors, which account for around a quarter of gross domestic product.

Low overseas demand, flagging domestic consumption and record-high youth unemployment are also weighing on China's post-pandemic recovery. Moody's this month downgraded Country Garden's credit rating to indicate that its obligations are "highly speculative" and at high risk of default. —AFP



Tourists take photographs in front of Khao Klang Nok monument at the Si Thep historical site in Thailand's Phetchabun province.



Tourists take photos at the Si Thep historical site.

Under the scorching sun, Thai archaeologist Tanachaya Tiandee clammers through ruined pagodas in the ancient town of Si Thep, trying to unlock their mysteries - a task made harder because many of the clues are missing. Looters stripped Thailand's rich historical sites such as Si Thep over decades, taking many items abroad. The kingdom is now trying to repatriate those stolen cultural treasures. "The big picture like the building was discovered, but the artefacts which tell little details are missing, making a lot of stories untold about Si Thep," Tanachaya told AFP. "It's like a piece of puzzle was missing."



A prayer garland next to the 6th-9th Century BC Dharmachakra artifact at the Si Thep historical site. — AFP photos

Si Thep, which archaeologists date back to between 1,500 to 1,700 years ago, may be inscribed in UNESCO's cultural world heritage list this week - Thailand's first addition since 1992. Over several centuries and under the influence of various cultures, it grew into a vital trading metropolis until its decline began in the late 13th century, according to the Thai government's submission to UNESCO.

As 33-year-old Tanachaya carefully excavates the ancient stone constructions, she faces a difficult task piecing together the stories of Si Thep, which lies around 200 kilometers (120 miles) north of Bangkok. It is believed that over the years, at least 20 objects have been stolen from the site, with experts identifying 11 in museums in the United States. The real number of looted objects is suspected to be far higher, thanks to a lack of documentation. Now Tanachaya - who decided when she was young that she wanted to become a Thai version of movie character In-



Thailand hunts for missing ancient site treasures

diana Jones - and her colleagues face their own quest. Can they bring their culture's treasures home?

'Won't accelerate'

Thailand's government, led at the time by the military, established the Committee to Monitor Thai Antiquities Abroad in 2017. About 340 objects have been voluntarily repatriated to Thailand since then, according to the latest report by the committee. But the process is slow, partly because government officials are wary of jeopardizing diplomatic relations with important

allies like the United States.

Instead, Thai authorities have pursued a "discreet" diplomatic route, explained the director-general of Thailand's Department of Fine Arts Phombootra Chandrachoti. "We won't accelerate anything," he told AFP. The Norton Simon Museum, located in the US state of California, holds nine Thai artefacts, according to a recent statement from the committee - including one item an independent expert says is from Si Thep park. The items were among 32 scattered in museums across the United States, the committee said.

The Norton Simon is only one of a number of US institutions - including New York's Metropolitan and San Francisco's Asian Art Museum - that have been named in the growing scandal around art that investigators claim was illegally removed from its country of origin. The museum told AFP it had not heard from the Thai government, but would cooperate with authorities if contacted, and defended holding the items. The works, which it claimed were legally purchased, "have been

carefully preserved and displayed" said Leslie Denk, vice-president of external affairs at the institution.

Dilemma over tourism

Thai historians face another dilemma: Si Thep's bid to become a UNESCO site could boost the local economy - but it could also put the fragile ancient site under strain. Presently, only one percent of visitors to Phetchabun - the province that is home to Si Thep - are foreigners, according to official 2019 data. The Thai government hopes UNESCO designation will help boost

the kingdom's tourism sector, which accounts for almost 20 percent of the country's GDP. There are, however, concerns about conservation.

The site is already "almost reaching its fullest capacity" of around 2,000 tourists a day, said Si Thep Historical Park head Sittichai Pooddee. "We will try to balance things. We will try to not over-promote," he said. Missing items mean gaps in the record, which makes it harder to satisfy the curiosity of tourists visiting the site, said Thai historian Tanongsak Hanwong.

"Artefacts dignify Thailand's past civilization, and when some of the parts are missing, we get stuck and we can't tell important pieces of the story to the world," Tanongsak said. At Si Thep's peaceful complex, domestic visitors gaze at a carefully carved pagoda wall. "It's the heritage that belongs to Thai people, and that we are proud of. It would be a pity not to get it back," said Chaowarat Munprom, a 66-year-old retiree. "It once belonged here." — AFP



Thai archaeologist Tanachaya Tiandee poses at the Si Thep historical site in Thailand's Phetchabun province.



Tourists look at a 6th-9th Century BC Dharmachakra artifact at the Si Thep historical site.



A tourist visits the Si Thep historical site in Thailand's Phetchabun province.



A miniature of the original Khao Klang Nok monument.

UNESCO adds Iran caravanserais to heritage sites list

The United Nations cultural organization on Sunday added many of Iran's caravanserais, roadside rest stops for travelers along the country's ancient trade routes, to its World Heritage List. The decision to register the 56 caravanserais, just a small percentage of the structures built in Iran, was made in Riyadh during the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee.

Caravanserais provided "shelter, food and water for caravans, pilgrims

and other travelers," UNESCO said on its website. Iran boasts more than 200 caravanserais on historic trade routes that traverse the country linking Asia and Europe, including the Silk Road.

"They are considered to be the most influential and valuable examples of the caravanserais of Iran, revealing a wide range of architectural styles, adaptation to climatic conditions, and construction materials, spread across thousands of kilometers and built over

many centuries," said UNESCO.

Among them are the caravanserais of Qasr-e Bahram near the city of Semnan, Deyr-e Gachin near Qom, and Anjireh Sangi near Yazd. Iran now has 27 UNESCO-listed historical sites, including the ancient city of Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire, Armenian monasteries in the northwest and the historic city of Yazd itself. — AFP

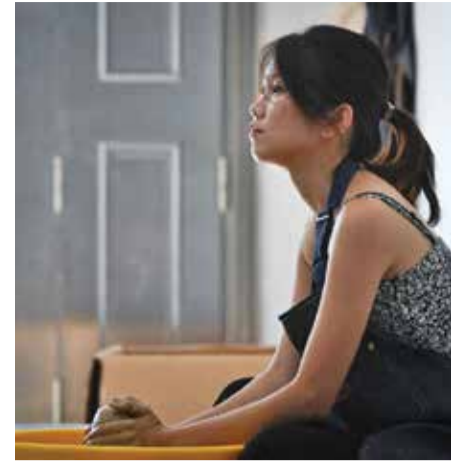
Lifestyle



People preparing to fire pottery products at a kiln workshop in Jingdezhen, China's Jiangxi province.—AFP photos



A group of people learning to make pottery at a workshop in Jingdezhen.



He Yun making pottery at her workshop.

China's "Porcelain Capital" Jingdezhen is attracting droves of young people drawn to the city of artisans in search of an escape from the urban rat race among its ceramics workshops.

The picturesque eastern city home to China's best-known porcelain has seen an influx of young professionals seeking to learn an ancient art taught there for more than a thousand years.

Times are tough for young people in China, with youth unemployment at record highs, sluggish economic growth and, for many, the opportunities their parents' generation enjoyed are simply not attainable. But in Jingdezhen they find something different: low rent, a slower pace of life and a proximity to nature in a city of just 1.6 million inhabitants, very small by Chinese standards.

From her one-bedroom apartment on the seventh floor, He Yun, a 28-year-old illustrator, enjoys a panoramic view of the surrounding green hills for just 500 yuan (\$68) a month.

She arrived in Jingdezhen in June after being laid off and found a place where she didn't feel "any pressure".

"I came because on social media everyone was saying that it was a great place for craft fans, like me, and that there was a scent of freedom," she said. "When I lost my job, I stayed at home and got depressed. But once I arrived here, I found that it's super easy to make friends." "No more need to set the alarm in the morning," she smiled. "I have zero pressure now!"

'Looking for meaning'

A typical day for He starts with a laid-back breakfast, before heading to a workshop to make her ceramic candle holders and necklaces, which are then fired in one of the city's many kilns.

"At the end of the afternoon, we go to the surrounding villages and swim in the streams to relax," she said.



CHINESE YOUTHS TRADE CITY-LIVING FOR CERAMICS

"I put my work on Xiaohongshu" -- a Chinese app similar to Instagram -- "where people contact me to buy. But we mainly sell at the market," she said.

Between trendy cafes, boutiques and stands offer glasses, bowls, cups, teapots, plates, necklaces or earrings.

Chen Jia, 24 with dyed red hair, makes feminist pendants in the shape of sanitary napkins.

A music graduate who arrived in June, her first jobs as a piano teacher and in a milk tea shop and cafe weren't to her liking. "I am looking for meaning in my life," she said. "Many young people today no longer want to clock in at work at a fixed time."

China's transformative economic rise was built on the backs of a growing

middle class, who were promised they could enjoy the trappings of prosperity and give their children a better life if they worked hard enough.

But the country's millennials and Gen Z have faced altogether different prospects: youth unemployment has reached a record level, exceeding 20 percent according to official figures, and pay is low.

It's in that context that the "tangping" counterculture has thrived. Literally meaning "lying flat", it's come to represent a general rejection of society's expectations, giving up a great career and money to concentrate on a simple life and pleasures. And Jingdezhen has become a haven for those seeking just that. At the Dashu pottery school,

around 20 students work with clay on their pottery wheels or chat as they sip iced lattes. Training costs 4,500 yuan a month (\$617), a very affordable price.

"Many young people cannot find work" explained the 39-year-old director who calls herself Anna. "They come here to reduce their anxiety." "Ceramics are very accessible. In two weeks, they can produce simple works and sell them at markets."

'New life'

One of them, Guo Yiyang, 27, resigned in March from a well-paid job as a computer programmer. After working overtime for years, he said he wanted to "take a breather". "In big cities... you just work. You don't have your own life,"

he said, adding he "never again" sees himself working that way. "The desire for another way of life" is also what motivated Xiao Fei, 27, a former interior designer who resigned and came to Jingdezhen in June. "I didn't have time for myself," she said. "I came home tired and I didn't want to talk to others." "I feel happier, more free and I meet people who have the same ideals."

According to Chinese media, 30,000 young urbanites lived in Jingdezhen in 2022. Few stay long-term but Xiao already knows that she doesn't want to go back. "After tasting this new life, I don't want to go back to an office job at all."—AFP



People visiting a night market in Jingdezhen, China's Jiangxi province.



A woman selling ceramic products via live streaming at a night market in Jingdezhen.



A ceramics vendor waiting for customers at a night market in Jingdezhen.

Danish artist ordered to return museum cash he took as 'art'

A Danish court on Monday ordered an artist to refund a museum which gave him 70,000 euros in cash to incorporate into artworks and he delivered blank canvasses entitled "Take the Money and Run".

Jens Haaning was commissioned by the Kunsten Museum in the western city of Aalborg to reproduce two works using the cash -- Danish kroner and euros -- to represent the annual salary in Denmark and Austria.

A Copenhagen court on Monday ordered Haaning, 58, to refund the museum 492,549 kroner (66,000 euros, \$70,480), equivalent to the sum the museum had given him minus the artist's fee and the mounting cost.

Museum director Lasse Andersson previously told AFP that he laughed out loud when he first saw the two blank canvasses in 2021, and decided to show the works anyway. He said they have a "humorous approach" and were "a reflection on how we value work".

But he said the museum would take Haaning to court if he didn't pay back the money, which he refused to do.

Interviewed on TV2 Nord television on Monday, Haaning said the museum had made "much, much more" money than what it invested thanks to the publicity surrounding the affair.—AFP



A woman stands in front of an empty frame hung up at the Kunsten Museum in Aalborg, Denmark.—AFP

Escaped Chinese crocodiles all captured: State media

Dozens of crocodiles that escaped a flooded Chinese farm have all been recaptured, state media reported on Tuesday, a week after the reptilian runaways wriggled free. More than 70 reptiles escaped from a commercial crocodile farm in the southern Chinese city of Maoming earlier this month after a typhoon inundated the area. Authorities in Guangdong Province launched an expansive hunt, with state broadcaster CCTV running footage of workers in rain boots dragging a crocodile out of the water with a rope. "The escaped Siamese crocodiles have all been caught, with the last one being hauled to shore on the night of September 18," the Communist Party-run Beijing News reported on Tuesday.

Beijing News footage showed a dozen crocodiles wriggling in mud with their jaws bound shut with fabric and rope, as workers stood among them holding umbrellas. The escapees included 69 fully grown crocodiles and two juveniles, Beijing News said. Crocodiles are bred in China for their skin as well as their meat, which is sometimes used in traditional medicine. The affected area is also home to a "crocodile theme park" and "the country's largest crocodile breeding base", according to China National Radio.—AFP

Black bear captured after shutting down Disney World rides

An apparently hungry black bear forced a brief shutdown of some attractions at Disney World's Magic Kingdom in Florida until it was captured, officials said. Local television station Fox 35 said more than a dozen popular rides at the Orlando theme park were closed after the bear was sighted in a tree, including the "Haunted Mansion" and "Pirates of the Caribbean."

"During the fall, bears are more active as they search for food to pack on fat reserves for the winter," Lisa Thompson, a spokeswoman for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conserva-

tion Commission, said in a statement. "This particular bear was likely moving through the area searching for food."

Thompson said that "in most cases, it is best for bears to be given space and to move along on their own."

"But given this situation, staff have captured the animal and are relocating the bear out of the park to an area in or around the Ocala National Forest."

Walt Disney World is one of the largest tourist attractions in the world, drawing tens of millions of visitors each year.—AFP



Lifestyle

Michael Jackson's moonwalk hat up for auction



A Gibson archtop hollow body electric guitar, model ES-5N, owned by US blues guitarist and singer T-Bone Walker, is displayed before being put on sale at auction in Paris.

Just before performing his famous moonwalk dance for the first time, Michael Jackson tossed his hat to the side of the stage. Four decades later, it's up for auction in Paris. The sale at the Hotel Drouot in Paris takes place on September 26. The black fedora is expected to fetch between 60,000 and 100,000 euros (\$64,000-\$107,000).

Though it is the star among some 200 items of rock memorabilia, organizer Arthur Perault of the Arpeges gallery admitted that valuations for Jackson items had fallen lately due to "the sale of fakes and the accusations against him". Jackson has long been accused of child abuse, which his heirs still contest and which the singer denied up to his death in 2009 at the age of 50.

The King of Pop whipped off the hat while breaking into his hit "Billie Jean" during a televised Motown concert in 1983, at the height of his fame. Moments later, Jackson showed off what would become his trademark move - the moonwalk - a seemingly effortless backwards glide while appearing to walk forwards.

A man named Adam Kelly picked up Jackson's hat, "thinking the singer's staff would come to collect it but they didn't", said Perault. He held on to it for several years but it has since passed through a couple of private collectors on its way to Paris. Also being auctioned are a guitar owned by the leg-

endary bluesman T-Bone Walker that could fetch up to 150,000 euros; a suit worn by Depeche Mode's Martin Gore; and one of Madonna's gold records.

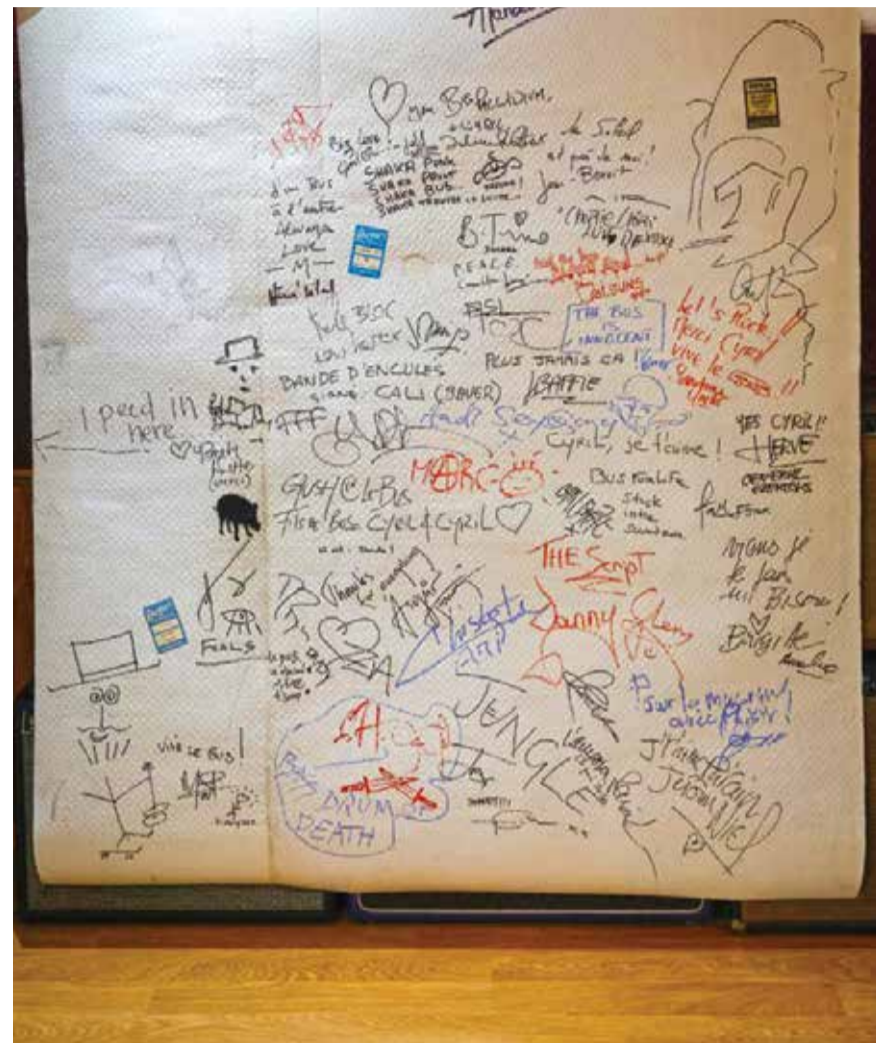
A chunk of wall from the Bus Palladium, a Paris venue that shut down last year, signed by numerous rock stars including members of The Libertines, Air and The Dandy Warhols, is valued at between 5,000 and 8,000 euros.

"Personally, I hope this wall stays in France. It is part of our heritage for all lovers of music and rock," said Perault.

Music memorabilia has become big business. Co-organizers Lemon Auction made a splash last year with the sale of a guitar smashed by Noel Gallagher on the night Oasis split up in Paris following a fight with his brother Liam. The instrument went for 385,500 euros.

This month, a series of auctions for items belonging to Freddie Mercury - including the piano on which he composed "Bohemian Rhapsody" - have made a total of 46.5 million euros at Sotheby's, attracting bidders from 76 countries. — AFP

A section of a wall from the Bus Palladium concert venue bearing artists' signatures and drawings, owned by the former artistic director Cyril Bodin, is displayed before being put on sale at auction in Paris.



Selected faceted, 'fancy' colored diamonds from the Argyle diamond mine.

Scientists find 'missing ingredient' for pink diamonds

Scientists said on Tuesday they have found the "missing ingredient" for pink diamonds, some of the world's most expensive stones due to their rarity and beauty, and the discovery could help find more.

More than 90 percent of all the pink diamonds ever found were discovered at the recently closed Argyle mine in the remote northwest of Australia.

But exactly why Argyle - which unlike most other diamond mines does not sit in the middle of a continent but on the edge of one - produced so many pink gems has remained a mystery.

In a new study published in the journal Nature Communications, a team of Australia-based researchers said the pink diamonds were brought to the Earth's surface by the break up of the first supercontinent around 1.3 billion years ago.

Hugo Olierook, a researcher at Curtin University in the state of Western Australia and the study's lead author, told AFP that two of the three ingredients for forming pink diamonds had already been known.

The first ingredient is carbon - and it must be in the bowels of Earth. Anything shallower than 150 kilometres (93 miles) deep would be graphite - "that stuff in your pencils, not nearly as pretty on an engagement ring", Olierook said. The second ingredient is just the right amount of pressure, to damage the otherwise clear diamonds.

"Push just a little bit and it turns pink. Push a little too hard and they turn brown," he said. Most of the diamonds discovered at Argyle were of this less valuable brown hue, he added.

'The second ingredient'

The missing ingredient was the volcanic event that sent the diamonds shooting up to the Earth's surface, where humans could get their hands on them. In the 1980s it was estimated that the Argyle diamonds emerged 1.2 billion years ago.

But there was no "trigger" for the rare diamonds to rise at that time, Olierook said, so the researchers sought to establish a more accurate timeline. They used a laser thinner than a human hair to probe tiny crystals in an Argyle rock sample supplied by the mine's owner, Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto.

By measuring the age of elements in the crystals, the researchers determined that Argyle was 1.3 billion years old - meaning the diamonds came up 100 million years later than previously thought. That lines up with the break-up of the world's first supercontinent, known as Nuna or Columbia.

In Nuna, "just about every single landmass on Earth was squashed together", Olierook said. The immense pressure that twisted color into the diamonds - the second ingredient - occurred during collisions between western Australia and northern Australia 1.8 billion years ago. When Nuna started to break up five hundred million years later, it re-aggravated the "scar" from that event, Olierook said. Magma shot up through this old scar "like a champagne cork going off", taking the diamonds along for the ride, he added. Study co-author Luc Doucet said such a "massive explosion" - which sent the diamonds travelling at near the speed of sound - has not taken place in recorded human history.

Where to look next?

Over the last 200 years, people have mostly looked for diamonds in the centre of massive continents.

But knowing the "missing ingredient" for pink diamonds could assist future efforts to find the rare stones, Olierook said, adding that discovering more was unlikely to be easy or quick.

Old mountain belts marking Nuna's breakup near the edges of continents have the potential to be home to a new "pink diamond paradise", he said, naming Canada, Russia, southern Africa and Australia as possible locations.

John Foden, an expert on diamonds at the University of Adelaide not involved in the study, told AFP that the researchers had "convincingly shown" the age of the Argyle diamonds.

But he cautioned that other diamond-rich provinces had also been linked to Nuna's break-up - and they had not produced pink diamonds. This suggests that "pinkness seems to be a local Argyle attribute", he added. The Argyle mine closed in 2020 due to "various financial reasons", Olierook said, meaning the value of pink diamonds could continue to rise as supply stalls. — AFP

Taylor Swift, Beyonce reporting jobs trigger controversy

It's rare for a news outlet to dedicate a reporter to one personality, but the publication USA Today has decided Taylor Swift and Beyonce are phenomena requiring their own beats.

The recent announcement by Gannett, which owns USA Today, that it was seeking two journalists to cover the biggest names in music as if they were running for president triggered both excitement and eyerolls - and broader conversation about coverage priorities in an increasingly fragmented and financially precarious news media environment. Gannett, which owns more than 200 daily newspapers, has slashed jobs across local markets over the past several years, laying off six percent of its news division in December. So news of the Tay and Bey positions struck a nerve.

"I suppose now is a good time to remind Twitter that I'm the only full-time news reporter left at my newspaper that was sold by Gannett in December," said Brad Vidmar on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. Vidmar, 41, works for The Hawk Eye, a newspaper in Burlington, Iowa that GateHouse, an investment firm-run publishing company, purchased in late 2016. In 2019 GateHouse acquired Gannett and took its name, becoming the largest newspaper company in the nation - and one with a reputation for scooping newspapers before curtailing their resources.

Gannett resold The Hawk Eye to a family-owned media company in late 2022 - its staff a skeleton of what it once was. "They just kept cutting and cutting and cutting staff all across the board," Vidmar told AFP. "What you saw was a situation where there are less reporters, reporters forced to take on multiple beats." Losing local content meant filling the paper with wire stories or stories from the broader USA Today network, he explained. Vidmar said Gannett's announcement of the Swift job made "my eyes roll." "They've been downsizing newsrooms for years now,

but of course they need somebody dedicated to covering Taylor Swift," he said.

'Shaping a generation'

Gannett said the new positions will be employed by USA Today and The Tennessean, the company's Nashville-based paper. The aim of the new jobs - which are in addition to three music reporters The Tennessean now employs - will be to "capture the excitement around Swift's ongoing tour... while also providing thoughtful analysis of her music and career," Gannett said. Another position is aimed at similarly analyzing Beyonce's

businesswomen. Their work has tremendous economic impact and societal significance influencing multiple industries and our culture - they are shaping a generation," Anton said.

Under pressure

Robert Thompson, a media scholar at Syracuse University, said his initial reaction to the new jobs was questioning whether "this is a joke." But he said after more reflection "I think it would be silly to categorically dismiss this... There are so few things that everybody really kind of knows whether they're fans or not, and



This combination of file pictures shows US singer-songwriter Beyonce and US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift. — AFP

impact. The NewsGuild's New York branch was skeptical, writing on X: "Gannett's strategy to be profitable again: 1) Lay off hundreds of reporters 2) Destroy local news coverage 3) Hire a Taylor Swift reporter."

Lark-Marie Anton, Gannett's chief communications officer, said in a statement to AFP that "these roles do not come at the expense of other jobs," noting that in Gannett's bid to "grow our audience" the company has hired 225 journalists since March and has more than 100 open roles. "Taylor Swift and Beyonce Knowles-Carter are artists and

Beyonce and Taylor Swift are some of the very rare ones." The jobs have the potential to allow for "really insightful ways to tell the story of 21st-century America through the lens of its most popular personages," he said. On the other hand, Thompson acknowledged that negative reaction to the new jobs in light of dwindling local news coverage is reasonable. "If you were to get a bunch of people together and say, 'We've got X number of dollars, how should they be spent?' Most of them would probably not say the Taylor Swift beat," he said. — AFP

Chioma Nnadi to become head of British Vogue



Chioma Nnadi will replace Edward Enninful as head of editorial content for fashion magazine British Vogue, its publisher said Tuesday, becoming the first black woman to fill the coveted role. Nnadi, has been at the magazine for 13 years, starting as a writer before assuming the post of fashion news director and her current role as digital editor at US Vogue.

The announcement ends months of speculation about who would replace Enninful, 51, who carved his place in

and in the fashion industry at large," said Wintour in a statement.

"I'm so grateful to Edward Enninful for everything he's accomplished at British Vogue, and we're all looking forward to a productive and creative relationship with him in his new role," she added. Enninful is expected to take up a global advisory position at Vogue. Fashion guru Wintour said London-born Nnadi had been able to connect the magazine with a digital audience and extend its reach across various platforms. She was born to a Swiss-German mother and a Nigerian father who came to the UK in the 1960s. The new magazine chief said she was "beyond excited and honored" to be taking on one of fashion's most influential jobs. — AFP

Vogue history as the first male, first black and first gay editor. The former model and stylist took over in 2017 amid a blaze of publicity, touted as a fresh and diverse face who could modernize the magazine.

But reports in recent years have suggested a power struggle with Vogue global editorial director Anna Wintour who he had hoped to succeed. "Chioma is beloved among her colleagues at Vogue, and is an editor and writer with an impeccable reputation - both here

Sports

Several striking Spain players arrive for national team camp

New Spain name a surprise 23-woman squad

BARCELONA: Six Spain players arrived at a Madrid hotel to join their women's national team camp on Tuesday, five of whom are currently striking over changes they want made in the Spanish football federation (RFEF). Spain's women's World Cup final-winning goalkeeper Olga Carmona and four others presented themselves, along with Athenea del Castillo, who is not on strike, while other players are expected to join up later for the camp in Oliva according to Spanish media reports.

Asked by a reporter if she was happy to be included in the squad, goalkeeper Misa Rodriguez replied "no" on her arrival to the hotel. The striking players issued a statement Monday in which they reiterated their wish not to be called up, but acknowledged legal consequences which may force them to attend. The Spanish government said early Tuesday players who do not attend would have to be punished under the country's sports law.

New Spain coach Montse Tome named a surprise 23-woman squad on Monday for upcoming Nations League qualifiers including 20 players who said they were striking until further changes were made in the RFEF after the kiss scandal which rocked Spanish football. Disgraced former federation president Luis Rubiales forcibly kissed midfielder

Jenni Hermoso on the lips after Spain won the World Cup in Sydney on August 20, provoking worldwide outrage.

Rubiales eventually resigned three weeks after the incident and controversial coach Jorge Vilda was sacked, but many players want more wide-ranging improvements and structural changes. As many as 39 players are on strike against the RFEF but they were told by the government early Tuesday that those who did not attend the team's camps when called up would have to be punished. Hermoso was not named in the squad by Tome in order to "protect" her, the new coach, Vilda's former assistant, said Monday. "Protect me from what? And from whom?" Hermoso posted on X, formerly Twitter, early Tuesday.

She accused the Spanish federation of seeking to "intimidate and threaten" the World Cup champion players by calling them up against their will for the upcoming matches. Victor Francos, the president of Spain's High Council for Sports (CSD), said early Tuesday he would have to apply the country's sports law against any player who snubbed the call. "If they don't turn up, the government would have to apply the law, which is a pity for me, but the law is the law," Francos told radio station Cadena Ser.

Spain's sports law from 2022 states that athletes must attend the call-ups of

the national teams when summoned, and not doing so would be a "very serious" infraction. The potential fines range between 3,000 and 30,000 euros (\$3,200 to \$32,100), while they could also lose their licenses to play altogether, for up to five years. The decision on a potential punishment would be made by Spain's top sports court at the request of the CSD. Spain play Sweden on September 22 and Switzerland on September 26 in the Nations League. The eventual finalists of the Nations League will qualify for the 2024 Olympic Games.

'We support them'

Spanish players were offered support by their Swedish counterparts. "They need to feel the support around them, that other countries support them in the decisions they make," said Sweden midfielder Filipa Angeldahl. "If they feel they have to boycott to make something happen, it's clear that we support them."

Goalkeeper Hedvig Lindahl wrote on X: "I expect UEFA and FIFA to protect players of the game they oversee rather than adding pressure. 'I don't want to be part of encouraging people to chase a football dream if the game will not protect them while doing so.'" "The RFEF does not have the right to deprive Spain of their women's national team, and more so after having won a World



MADRID: Spain's Olga Carmona and teammates leave after a meeting with new coach of Spain's women football team in a hotel in Madrid on Sept 19, 2023 ahead of the UEFA Nations League football matches against Sweden and Switzerland. — AFP

Cup," said the Spanish minister for culture and sport, Miquel Iceta.

"We call on the RFEF to correct all the deficiencies of this irregular call-up and to change the federation's structures so that the federation is a place of security, competitiveness and professionalism to which the play-

ers and the Spanish population as a whole have a right." Tome, her staff, and the players who have arrived in Madrid travel to Oliva, in the east of Spain near Valencia, early Tuesday afternoon. They will fly to Sweden on Thursday morning before playing in Gothenburg on Friday. — AFP

News in Brief

Nakagami extends deal

PARIS: Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami extended his contract with MotoGP team Honda-LCR for next season, the satellite constructor announced on Tuesday. The 31-year-old has raced for Honda-LCR since 2018. "I feel LCR is part of my family, and of course, I'm excited to be with them for another season," Nakagami said in a team statement. "Now it's time to work even harder to be ready for the future." He is currently 17th in the riders' standings this season as Honda have struggled to keep up with the pace set by Ducati. Nakagami will team up with Johann Zarco next season after the Frenchman announced he would join Honda-LCR from Ducati-Pramac for 2024. "We believe it's time to keep pushing, as he's one of the most experienced guys with this bike," said team principal Lucio Cecchinello of Nakagami. "We will give our best to fight for the positions we aim for." — AFP

Montreal MLS player sacked

MONTREAL: Major League Soccer said Monday that Montreal midfielder Matko Miljevic has been sacked for "engaging in conduct detrimental to the league." A brief statement from MLS said the 22-year-old had his contract terminated following reports he violated league rules by playing in an amateur league using a fake name. Reports in Canada last week said Miljevic had been banned from an amateur league in Quebec for punching another player in the face during a game. Miljevic reportedly used a false name to play in the indoor league in a breach of his MLS contract. MLS did not go into details of Miljevic's alleged offences in a brief one-sentence statement released Monday. "Following an investigation, Major League Soccer has terminated the contract of CF Montreal midfielder Matko Miljevic for engaging in conduct detrimental to the league and violating his Standard Player Agreement," MLS said. — AFP

Caldara undergoes surgery

MILAN: Italy international Mattia Caldara will be out of action until at least December after undergoing ankle surgery, his club AC Milan said on Monday. Milan said that Caldara's "recovery timeframe is estimated to be around three months" after successful keyhole surgery. Coach Stefano Pioli said ahead of Saturday's 5-1 thumping by Inter Milan that he expected Caldara to be ruled out "for some time" due to his ankle problem. Caldara, 29, who has two Italy caps, returned to Milan this summer after two years on loan at relegated Venezia and Spezia and is yet to feature this season. The youth academy graduate had been a surprise inclusion in Milan's Champions League squad, despite the club trying to offload him in the summer, due to rules on home-grown players. Milan face Newcastle United in their opening Group F match on Tuesday evening at the San Siro. — AFP

Draxler leaves PSG for Al-Ahli

PARIS: German international midfielder Julian Draxler has left Paris Saint-Germain to sign for Al-Ahli of Qatar, the French club announced on Monday. Qatar-owned PSG said Draxler, 29, had joined the Doha-based side on a permanent deal without revealing any details about the fee for a player whose contract in the French capital still had a year to run. Al-Ahli, who came eighth in the 12-team Qatar Stars League last season, said Draxler had signed a deal until 2025 after completing his medical on Sunday. Draxler's move to Qatar from PSG follows that of Italy midfielder Marco Verratti, who joined Al-Arabi last week for a fee of close to 50 million euros (\$53.3m) according to French media reports. Senegal defender Abdou Diallo also left PSG for Al-Arabi last month. Draxler, who was in Germany's squad for their triumphant 2014 World Cup campaign, played for Schalke and Wolfsburg before joining PSG in January 2017 for a reported 36 million euros plus bonuses. — AFP



KUWAIT: The Board of Director of Kuwait Sea Sport Club honored members of Public Relations and Information Committee as well as Speed Boats and Jet Ski players in the presence of Secretary General Khalid Al-Foudary and board members. Jet Ski riders who secured top places at the French International Championship are Mohammad Barabea (first place) and Mohammad Al-Baz (second place). Promising player Fahad Al-Rayes won second place in the Beginners Category.

Italy aim high to avoid Uruguay crosshairs

NICE: Italy head into Wednesday's World Cup match against Uruguay in the knowledge that the South Americans will likely have targeted them rather than Pool A heavyweights France and New Zealand. The Italians kicked off their campaign with a 52-8 victory over Namibia, while Uruguay were combative against a second-string France before going down 27-12. With two huge games against the All Blacks and then France on September 29 and October 6, both in Lyon, Italy know they need to make sure of a victory against Uruguay to go into those games with heads held high.

"This is their World Cup game, and it's the same for us as well. We have to beat them and they want to

beat us with everything," Italy defense coach Marius Goosen told AFP. "They're not the lesser team but if you look at Namibia, Chile and all those teams who, when they play the so-called third-ranked team in the group, that's their World Cup. 'I'm sure Uruguay, if you speak to them, they will say Italy is everything for them.'" Goosen added: "They don't really look at France and New Zealand probably. We know what's coming and we're ready for it, if we don't front up properly we'll get beaten, it's as simple as that."

Uruguay's performance against hosts France caught many by surprise and Goosen is expecting more of the same: "A lot of passion and a lot of grunt. 'We expected that and we're expecting that on Wednesday as well. They are a fully professional team now, we've been tracking them since we knew we would play them in a World Cup.'" Uruguay coach Esteban Meneses has made two changes to his starting 15 from the team that lost to France. German Kessler comes in at hooker and Gaston Mieres onto the wing, while there are 13 survivors in the match-day 23 from the last time the two sides played, in 2021. —AFP

Erasmus: Springboks puppet master who divides opinion

PARIS: South African director of rugby Rassie Erasmus describes himself in his biography as "a quiet, uncomplicated person" and he is far from the extrovert many perceive him to be. The 50-year-old is certainly someone who divides opinion, his supporters as forthright in their defense of him as those in the opposing camp are in venting their spleen. The critics will be especially watchful this week.

They will assess with a fine tooth comb how he talks about referee Ben O'Keefe in both the lead-up and after Saturday's Rugby World Cup pool game between defending champions South Africa and Ireland, the world's number one ranked team. His rants against referees, allied with sarcastic remarks in tweets about them, has landed him in trouble. World Rugby banned him for 12 months after he savaged referee Nic Berry in the first Test with the British and Irish Lions in 2021.

However, Erasmus' defenders would point out his brilliance in turning round a shambolic Springboks side when he and faithful assistant Jacques Nienaber took over in early 2018. Within two years the man Erasmus picked as the Springboks first black captain, Siya Kolisi, was lifting the World Cup trophy. Erasmus and Nienaber - who moved up to become head coach after the 2019 World Cup - appear polar opposites, the latter like the straight man in a comedy double act, the former the charismatic wise-cracking scene stealer.

Erasmus insists in his biography "Rassie: Stories of Life and Rugby", co-authored with journalist David O'Sullivan, the real him is far removed from the one that attracts the ire of his many detractors. "I may



South Africa's Director of Rugby Rassie Erasmus

come across as a loudmouth, opinionated, arrogant, unrepentant ... people think I'm extroverted, but I'm not," he says. "I find social occasions difficult ... I'm a quiet, uncomplicated person." Many of those who have been on the wrong end of his tweets would prefer he had remained quiet - clearly unrepentant, he received a further two-match ban only weeks after returning to the coaches box in November 2022.

'Trust each other'

More sinister was the impact that the sarcastic remarks over Wayne Barnes's decisions in the 30-26 loss to France in Paris last year had on the English official's family after they sparked a host of abusive messages to his family. "I've seen some things in the last few years, but receiving direct messages from rugby 'fans' threatening to kill your kids & burn your house down with your family in it over a few on-field decisions is a new low for me, my family & a plague for our entire game," tweeted Barnes's wife Polly. Erasmus's loose use of language and disregard for the consequences jars a little with his sensitivity surrounding his upbringing with an alcoholic father. —AFP

Today's matches

UEFA Champions League		
Galatasaray v Kobenhavn	19:45	beIN Sports HD Xtra 1
Real Madrid v Union Berlin	19:45	beIN Sports HD 2
Bayern Munich v Man United	22:00	beIN Sports HD 1 English
Benfica v Red Bull Salzburg	22:00	beIN Sports HD 2
Real Sociedad v Inter Milan	22:00	beIN Sports HD 4
Sporting Braga v Napoli	22:00	beIN Sports HD 6
Arsenal v Eintracht Frankfurt	22:00	beIN Sports HD 3
Sevilla v Lens	22:00	beIN Sports HD 5
UEFA Europa Conference League		
Lille v Olimpija Ljubljana	17:30	beIN Sports HD 3
AFC Champions League		
Buriram United v Zhejiang	13:00	beIN Sports AFC HD
Melbourne City v Ventforet Kofu	13:00	beIN Sports AFC HD
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors v Kitchee	13:00	beIN Sports AFC 1 HD
Hanoi v Pohang Steelers	15:00	beIN Sports AFC HD
Wuhan Three Towns v Urawa Red	15:00	beIN Sports AFC 3 HD

South Korea beat Kuwait



KUWAIT: Kuwait's U-23 team lost 9-0 to South Korea's U-23 team in their opening match at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China on Tuesday. Kuwait plays Bahrain on Thursday and Thailand on Sunday in their remaining Group E matches. — KUNA

Sports

Al Hilal salvage a 1-1 draw in Asian Champions League

Neymar endures an Asian Champions League debut to forget

DUBAI: Brazil star Neymar endured an Asian Champions League debut to forget as Al Hilal had to score deep into injury-time to salvage a 1-1 at home to Uzbekistan's Navbahor in Riyadh on Monday. Neymar, signed last month from Paris Saint-Germain for a reported €90 million, was making his first start for the record Asian champions having debuted on Friday as a substitute in the Saudi Pro League victory at home to Al Riyadh.

Runners-up in last year's Champions League, Hilal were fortunate not to lose their Group B opener having gone behind on 52 minutes at King Fahd International Stadium to Toma Tabata-dze's expert finish. Navbahor, the 2022 Uzbekistan Super League runners-up, were competing in the Champions League for the first time.

However, Hilal defender Ali Al Bulaihi rescued a point for the four-time champions in the 100th minute, rising unmarked in the Navbahor area to head home Michael's corner. Neymar, who earlier this month became Brazil's all-time lead goalscorer, had largely a night

to forget. The forward was subjected to some particularly robust treatment from Navbahor, and was incensed just before the hour when he was trod on after being dragged to the ground.

Moments later, Neymar was booked for pushing over an opponent and then angrily kicking the ball at the player as he lay on the pitch. Neymar did have a chance get Hilal back into the game three minutes from time, but his close-range header was straight at Navbahor goalkeeper Utkir Yusupov. Yusupov then made a spectacular save in injury-time to deny Serbia striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, although he could do nothing to prevent Al Bulaihi's leveller.

Also in Group D, Iranian debutants Nassaji Mazandaran won 2-0 away to India's Mumbai City. Meanwhile, Saudi champions Al Ittihad began their quest for a third Champions League title with a comfortable 3-0 victory at home to Uzbekistan's AGMK in Jeddah. Ittihad, back-to-back winners in 2004 and 2005, went into the Group C opener without Ballon d'Or holder Karim Benzema, who

was injured, but struck twice in six minutes early in the first half.

Haroune Camara, starting in Benzema's absence, opened the scoring at the Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium on 10 minutes before Romarinho soon doubled the hosts' advantage. The Brazilian got his second of the night four minutes before half-time, as Nuno Espirito-Santo's side eased to the three points. In the group's other fixture, Iraq's Air Force Club held 2007 runners-up Sepahan, of Iran, to a 2-2 draw in Erbil.

In Group B, two-time Asian champions Al Sadd drew 0-0 at home with UAE side Sharjah - Algeria's Baghdad Bounedjah missed a second-half penalty for the hosts - while Jordan's Al Faisaly sunk to a 1-0 defeat in injury-time to Uzbekistan's Nasaf in Amman. The group stage, which this year returned to a home-and-away format for the first time since early 2020, runs until mid-December, with the 10 pool winners and the six best second-placed teams advancing to the knockout rounds. That begins in February. The final takes place, across two legs, in May. — AFP



RIYADH: Hilal's Brazilian forward #10 Neymar reacts during the AFC Champions League Group D football match between Al Hilal and PFC Navbahor Namangan at King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh on September 18, 2023. — AFP

Pressure on as Bayern, Kane set out for only trophy that matters

MUNICH: Harry Kane's Bayern Munich host Manchester United on Wednesday, kick-starting their campaign in the competition which matters most to them this season. Despite domestic dominance which has seen Bayern win the past 11 Bundesliga titles, the club judges itself on its performances in the Champions League. Since winning in Lisbon in 2020, Bayern have been eliminated at the quarter-final stage of the Champions League for three straight years.

These early eliminations led to the exits of former managers Hansi Flick and Julian Nagelsmann. Current Bayern boss Thomas Tuchel, who took over from a sacked Nagelsmann who had won eight from eight in the Champions League, is aware that making it at least to the semis is considered par for the course in Munich. While this understanding is not new for Bayern or indeed any of the handful of modern superclubs where domestic success is assured, the big money addition of Kane makes winning now a necessity.

100 million reasons

Bayern broke their transfer record to lure Kane from Tottenham in the summer, paying 100 million euros (\$108 million) for the 30-year-old England captain. With Bundesliga titles and German Cups finding their way to Munich more often than not, Kane's move to Bayern has clearly boosted his chances of capturing that elusive first trophy. But only by winning the Champions League will his decision to leave England be seen as an unqualified success.

The England captain said as much when un-



MUNICH: (Left to right) Bayern Munich's assistant coach Holger Broich, Bayern Munich's midfielder #07 Serge Gnabry, midfielder #25 Thomas Mueller, midfielder #06 Joshua Kimmich, midfielder #08 Leon Goretzka and English midfielder #09 Harry Kane jog during the training session at the team's training ground in Munich. — AFP

veiled in Munich, explaining "I want to play for the Champions League title, that's why I came to Bayern." Kane has shown few difficulties adjusting to life in Germany, having scored four goals in his first four league matches. Kane said on Monday he was looking forward to "something special" in his first Champions League match for Bayern - and first against Premier League opposition since arriving in Munich.

The striker told Germany's Sports Illustrated that he "wants to get the supporters behind us as early as possible and approach the game with a lot of intensity." Early starts are common for Bayern in the Champions League. The six-time winners have won their opening match for the past 19 seasons. Bayern will however need to see the match through without Tuchel, who saw red as his side was eliminated by eventual champions Man City last season.

Tuchel will watch from the stands, with his assistant Zsolt Low taking the reins. Typically

fiery, Tuchel has pointed much of his scorn at his own club this season, particularly after Bayern failed to sign a defensive midfielder. Bayern had tried - the club brought Fulham's Joao Palhinha to Munich on deadline day and had the Portugal star taking pictures in club shirts on deadline day - but the deal broke down and the midfielder flew back to London.

Despite netting Kane, Serie A defender of the year Kim Min-Jae and a host of other useful additions, Tuchel hit out at the club, calling the club "gutsy" for giving him such a "thin" squad. "We will see if it's enough for the club's targets this season." While squad complaints are a sport of their own for modern managers, letting go of Benjamin Pavard, Ryan Gravenberch, Lucas Hernandez, Josip Stanisic and to a lesser extent Marcel Sabitzer and Sadio Mane could come back to haunt the side once the games start coming thick and fast. — AFP

Bellingham ready for 'Real' debut in Champions League

BARCELONA: Jude Bellingham scored for Real Madrid on his debut, and in four of the five matches which have followed, in a superb start to life in the Spanish capital for the former Birmingham boy. The England midfielder has five goals in five games in La Liga, taking the Spanish top flight by storm after his 103 million euro (\$110 million) move from Borussia Dortmund this summer.

Real Madrid boast a 100 per cent record from their opening raft of domestic games, but their season begins in earnest with the start of the Champions League this week. Bellingham, 20, is set to make his 'second' debut for Los Blancos against Union Berlin on Wednesday at the Santiago Bernabeu, in the competition they value above all others.

The record 14-time European champions were thrashed 4-0 by Manchester City in the second leg of last season's semi-final, 5-1 on aggregate, with Bellingham's purchase in part a response to that stinging defeat. Madrid have started reducing minutes for their veteran players in midfield - Luka Modric and Toni Kroos - while allowing Bellingham, Eduardo Camavinga, Aurelien Tchouameni and Fede Valverde more opportunities. Bellingham adds to the tougher core Madrid sport this season, shorn of Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema, who departed for a new adventure in Saudi Arabian football in the summer.

Facing a Bundesliga side in Europe, Bellingham should feel comfortable - although it has become clear that he has already made himself at home. In his first appearance at the hallowed Bernabeu the England international nearly blew the stadium's new roof off with a last gasp 95th minute strike to earn Madrid a narrow win over Getafe in a derby on September 2. Wearing the No 5 on his back in tribute to Zinedine Zidane, Bellingham has quickly become a fan favorite at Madrid.

Celebrating his goals with his arms open wide, as if to share his joy with the supporters, they have instantly taken to him in a way which never happened with Welsh winger Gareth Bale. Bellingham has been serenaded with the chorus of Beatles song "Hey Jude", which he said was a special moment. "When they sang 'Hey Jude' at the end, I got goosebumps," he told Real Madrid TV after the win over Getafe. "I just wanted to turn and stand still and listen to it while my legs were shaking."

Bellingham nodded to Spanish culture with a matador's flag waving gesture after dodging an attempted barge by a Getafe player. "Good players with personality suffer a bit less than the others," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, when asked how Bellingham had clicked so quickly. "There's no other reason. A player with personality, above all, more than quality, means that an important shirt like Real Madrid's doesn't weigh so much." — AFP

Pressure mounts on Man United boss as Bayern clash looms

MANCHESTER: Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag is starting to feel the heat from frustrated fans of the Red Devils after a disastrous start to the season has left hopes of Premier League glory already looking forlorn. For the first time in the Premier League era United have lost three of their opening five games and face a daunting task to open their Champions League campaign away to Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

Ten Hag had been sheltered from criticism in the early weeks of the campaign as supporters concentrated their anger towards a series of off-field issues. Despite the fans' desire to see them gone, the Glazer family appear to have put a process to sell the club on hold. Brazilian winger Antony has been given a leave of absence to fight domestic abuse allegations made by his

ex-girlfriend. Meanwhile, United decided Mason Greenwood had no future at Old Trafford last month despite abuse charges against the 21-year-old being dropped.

Ten Hag was credited for returning United to the Champions League by finishing third in the Premier League last season and ending the club's six-year trophy drought by winning the League Cup. However, he was the target for a chorus of boos when he substituted new signing Rasmus Hojlund midway through the second-half of Saturday's 3-1 home defeat to Brighton. The Dutch coach tried to spin that moment into a positive show of support for Hojlund, who was making his home debut after a £64 million (\$79 million) move from Atalanta.

The Dane has only recently returned to fitness and Ten Hag could ill

afford to lose another key player by forcing him to play 90 minutes too soon. But United's bet on the 20-year coming good in the long run could face a backlash should they be undone by Harry Kane in Germany. Despite their need for a striker, United never tested Tottenham's resolve for the England captain, who instead joined Bayern in a 100 million euro (\$110 million, £86 million) deal. Kane has hit the ground running with four goals in as many starts, while Hojlund is yet to find the net for United.

Sancho disciplined

To add to United's woes going forward, winger Jadon Sancho is also absent from first-team action due to a spat with his manager. Sancho, who cost £73 million from Borussia Dortmund just two years ago, has been ordered to train on his own after claiming he was a "scapegoat" when Ten Hag criticized his poor performances in training. Ten Hag's disciplinarian streak was heralded as part of



Manchester United's Dutch manager Erik ten Hag

his success in his first season as even Cristiano Ronaldo and Marcus Rashford were not afforded special treatment. The United boss is yet to face much fan fury for his latest stance as Sancho has failed to live up to his price tag. But that decision has lifted the pressure on Ten Hag to lift the mood around the club with an upturn in results on the pitch. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Geja (current name in passport) Gurmej Singh holder of Indian Passport No. P7110431 having permanent address Punjab State, India 144620 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Gurmej and Singh (surname) (#4230) 20/9/2023

I'm Balu Krishnamumari, holder of Indian Passport No. T8986396, resident of Kakarlavaripalli, Chakrampeta, Penagalur mandal, YSR Dist. A.P. India, have changed my name Krishnamumari to Krishna Kumari (given name) and Balu (surname) in all of my dealings and documents. (#4229) 19/9/2023

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Steelers down Browns; Saints win

Game overshadowed by Chubb horror injury

LOS ANGELES: Pittsburgh produced a superb defensive display to defeat Cleveland 26-22 on Monday in a game overshadowed by a gruesome season-ending injury to Browns running back Nick Chubb. The Steelers defense snaffled two touchdowns from turnovers, with Alex Highsmith grabbing an interception for a pick six on the first Cleveland play of the game after a misplaced pass from quarterback Deshaun Watson.

Highsmith then forced a fumble from Watson midway through the fourth quarter, allowing Steelers star TJ Watt to scoop up the loose ball and run in the first touchdown of his NFL career for what turned out to be the winning score. Pittsburgh's defense - which sacked Watson six times throughout - then came up with two more big stops in the closing stages to thwart Cleveland's hopes of snatching victory at the Steelers' Acrisure Stadium. "We feed off the crowd, obviously there's a lot of things we need to correct, but we'll take tonight and celebrate," Watt said.

George Pickens scored Pittsburgh's other touchdown of the night, a 71-yard score from a pass by quarterback Kenny Pickett. The Browns meanwhile were left reeling the loss and a sickening injury to running back Chubb early in the second quarter. The 27-year-old four-time Pro Bowler clutched his left knee in agony after being tackled by Steelers safety Minkah Fitzpatrick and linebacker Cole Holcomb.

Chubb - who also suffered a serious injury to his left knee in 2015 during his college career - was carted off the field following the hit, which prompted an outpouring of support from sports stars on social media. "DAMN MAN! Nick Chubb. Praying for the absolute best," NBA superstar and Cleveland fan LeBron James wrote. "Prayers for Nick Chubb, never want to see that," Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kyler Murray added. Browns head coach Kevin Stefanski said Chubb had suffered a "significant knee injury" that was likely to rule him out for the remainder of the season.

In Monday's other NFL game, the New Orleans Saints continued their unbeaten start to the season after downing the Carolina Panthers 20-17 in a defensive arm-wrestle between the two NFC South divisional rivals. An attritional battle was locked at 6-6 early in the third quarter, with Panthers kicker Eddy Pineiro and his Saints counterpart Blake Grupe slotting two field goals apiece. But the game was blown open by a moment of magic from Saints receiver Chris Olave, who made an astonishing one-handed catch on third down from a

pass by quarterback Derek Carr to keep the drive alive.

The Saints duly capped the 10-play, 75-yard drive with a close-range touchdown from Tony Jones Jr. to take a 13-6 lead. Although Pineiro cut the deficit with a third field goal to make it 13-9, another Jones touchdown from two yards put New Orleans 20-9 up with just over three minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. Although the Panthers rallied with a late Adam Thielen touchdown, the Saints recovered the subsequent on-side kick and ran down the clock for the win. — AFP



PITTSBURGH: Nick Chubb #24 of the Cleveland Browns is injured on a tackle by Cole Holcomb #55 of the Pittsburgh Steelers during the second quarter on September 18, 2023. — AFP

Arsenal's Rice ready for first taste of CL

LONDON: Mikel Arteta expects Declan Rice to play a pivotal role in Arsenal's return to the Champions League (CL) as the England midfielder prepares to make his debut in the tournament against PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday. The Gunners are back in the Champions League for the first time since 2016/17, giving Rice his first taste of Europe's elite club competition after his close-season move from West Ham.

Arteta splashed out £100 million (\$124 million) on the midfielder precisely for occasions such as PSV's visit to the Emirates Stadium in Arsenal's opening Group B fixture. The 24-year-old has made a confident start to life with Arsenal, scoring his first goal for the club in dramatic fashion against Manchester United on September 3. Rice's finish deep into stoppage time put Arsenal on course for a 3-1 win in their first meeting with a top-four rival this season.

It was a perfectly timed reminder of the quality Rice brings to Arteta's side as they try to make amends for last season's late collapse in the Premier League title race. Arsenal squandered

an eight-point lead in the final weeks of the season as Manchester City ended the Gunners' bid for a first title since 2004. Arteta believes Rice's astute reading of the game and unflappable demeanor strengthens his team, praising him after the win against United.

"How he breaks up play, how he glues the team together in many moments when it was stretched a little bit," he said. "He was really dominant and then produced a magic moment to win the game." And the Arsenal boss said his new signing can also be a regular goal threat. "For sure and when you see the technical ability that he has and how he executed it in this moment, his range when he's shooting from range, his accuracy, the power that he generates with no space, with both legs, he can do it with both feet. He's got the timing to arrive in the box."

Along with helping Arsenal challenge for the title - the north Londoners are two points behind leaders Manchester City after Sunday's 1-0 win at Everton - Rice will be firmly in the spotlight in the Champions League. Having played his entire career with West Ham until this season, he has never experienced the thrill of lining up while the Champions League anthem booms out before kick-off. But he will finally be able to tick that off his bucket list on Wednesday. "I'm so excited for that. I've said for many years now that I've wanted to play in



Arsenal's English midfielder Declan Rice

the Champions League," Rice said. "I've wanted to push myself at the biggest level. This opportunity at Arsenal has arisen. It's a great club." Rice has already made his mark in continental action, captaining West Ham to their first major trophy since 1980 last season when they won the Europa Conference League. He has made his mark for England as well, featuring as the fulcrum of Gareth Southgate's midfield in their run to the European Championship final in 2021 and impressing at last year's World Cup.

Despite their lengthy absence from

the Champions League, the Gunners are expected to progress from a relatively undemanding group featuring Sevilla and Lens as well as PSV. But Rice knows he must use Arsenal's opening group fixtures to show he can dominate at the highest level, with his sights already set on inspiring his side to a maiden Champions League triumph. "At the end of the day you get one career, and I want to be as successful as I can with Arsenal, make as many Champions League appearances as possible and hopefully one day get my hands on that trophy," he said. — AFP

Hudson-Odoi saves Forest from defeat

NOTTINGHAM: Callum Hudson-Odoi's stunning strike salvaged a 1-1 draw for Nottingham Forest as Burnley were denied a first Premier League win of the season on Monday. Zeki Amdouni scored the only goal when the sides met in the League Cup last month and the Swiss international put Vincent Kompany's men in front four minutes before half-time. Luca Koleosho was the creative spark for the Claret's as he got to the byline before Amdouni's sweet strike from the edge of the box arched into the bottom corner. Hudson-Odoi's career has drifted since he broke into the England team as a teenager.

But the former Chelsea winger showed what he is capable of to level on the hour mark with a curling effort that clipped the inside of the post on its way into the top corner. Burnley still thought they had claimed all three points when Lyle Foster found the net, 13 minutes from time. But a VAR check ruled Sander Berge had handled before teeing up the South African. Foster's frustration was then compounded in stoppage time when he was shown a red card in stoppage time for lashing out at Ryan Yates. The 10 men held on to at least register Burnley's first point back in the Premier League. A draw is enough to edge Forest up to eighth. — AFP

Iranians give Ronaldo rapturous welcome

TEHRAN: Crowds of Iranian football fans gave Cristiano Ronaldo an excited welcome on Monday as his Saudi team arrived in Tehran for the first home-and-away club tie since the two countries resumed diplomatic relations. Fans chanted the name of the Portuguese five-time world player of the year as he arrived with his Al Nassr teammates to face Iran's leading club Persepolis in the Asian Champions League on Tuesday. The match will be the first since Tehran and Riyadh reached a China-brokered deal that was announced in March. Teams from both countries had only played matches on neutral grounds since 2016 when Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia and Shiite-majority Iran severed ties.

In Tehran, excitement filled the air as fans eagerly waited to catch a glimpse of 38-year-old Ronaldo as he left Iran's Imam Khomeini's airport with his teammates. "It was a very good feeling, and we all enjoyed it," Al Nassr manager Luis Castro said in his press conference. "We saw a series of scenes and many Iranian fans were even holding Al Nassr team shirts, which was a pleasant event for us." Large crowds of cheering fans lined the streets as Ronaldo arrived at a hotel in Tehran on board the team bus.

Others chanting "Ronaldo, Ronaldo!" even flooded into the hotel lobby. Posters of the former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus star with "Welcome", written in Arabic, English and Farsi sprung up in the Iranian capital's main streets. Ahead of the match, Persepolis manager Yahya Golmohammadi expressed his happiness at hosting the "great team" of Al Nassr, but said his team was equal to the challenge of taking on the Saudi club. "I think it will be a beautiful game and will have a lot of excitement," said 28-year-old Navid Borhanifar, a Ronaldo fan. "It's very exciting for me."

Sadly for the fans, none will be allowed to attend the match which will be held at the gigantic Azadi stadium, which can host up to 90,000 people. The Asian Football Confederation have ruled that the game be played behind closed doors as punishment for a controversial 2021 online post by Persepolis before a match against an Indian team. Both managers have lamented the absence of the fans. "An empty stadium does not give the taste of real football," Castro said. "We are sad that this great game is without spectators," Golmohammadi said.

Ronaldo and his teammates have been placed under the protection of an "elite unit", specialized in securing presidential visits, according to sports website Varzesh 3. The unit will be in charge of "preventing any contact between fans and players of the Saudi team," it added. Ronaldo's arrival has also sparked



TEHRAN: Fans of Saudi football club Al-Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo gather outside the team's hotel in Tehran on September 18, 2023. — AFP

a debate over Iran's internet restrictions. Iran has imposed strict curbs - including on WhatsApp and Instagram - since last year's mass protests triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini.

Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, had been arrested for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's dress code for women. Last week, Persepolis's general

manager Reza Darvish proposed that the Saudi team be given SIM cards with unfiltered internet access. "I have talked to the CEO of IranCell (a local provider and sponsor to Persepolis) and asked for SIM cards for... players and those who accompany them with unlimited internet," he said. Ronaldo himself has more than 604 million Instagram followers. — AFP