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NOTICE

On the occasion of birthday of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on September 29, 2023. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.com and our digital media channels on Instagram, X, Facebook, Tik-Tok, LinkedIn and Threads.

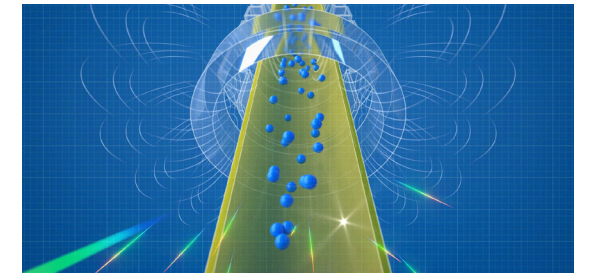
3 Jaber Hospital performs a complex and rare surgery



3 Ministry of Health launches winter vaccination campaign



5 Scientists observe as mysterious antimatter particles fall down



Kuwait shooter makes history

- First gold medal for Kuwait at Asian Games
- Qatari shooter grabs bronze medal

- Al-Turqi dedicates victory to Kuwait's leadership, Kuwaitis
- Remarkable and distinctive performance

Kharafi gifts Volvo vehicle to Al-Turqi, \$5,000 to Shamlan

KUWAIT: Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi has gifted Abdullah Al-Turqi Al-Rashidi a brand new Volvo vehicle after he won a gold medal in skeet shooting at the 19th Asian Games. Kharafi also gifted Yousef Al-Shamlan \$5,000 after he won a bronze medal in fencing at the Asian Games. Furthermore, Kharafi announced gifting a vehicle to each athlete who wins a gold medal, \$10,000 to each athlete who wins a silver medal and \$5,000 to each athlete who wins a bronze medal during the tournament, in order to encourage Kuwait's athletes to give their best while representing the country.



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti shooter Abdullah Al-Turqi won the gold medal in the skate competition at the 19th Asian Games held in the Chinese city of Hangzhou on Wednesday. Al-Turqi hit all of the 60 clay targets. He expressed his overwhelming feelings and dedicated his great victory to Kuwait's leadership and Kuwaitis. Turqi said that the competition witnessed great competition both in the qualifiers and in the first round. He wished good luck to his colleagues in the upcoming competitions. The president of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, lauded Al-Turqi's victory. He said that this achievement confirms the ability of Kuwaiti athletes to compete, get the best results, and hoist the country's flag on the international stage. Al-Turqi was crowned on Wednesday with the first gold medal for Kuwait and the second overall at the 19th consecutive Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, as part of the skate shooting competitions after coming first in the final of the competition. The champion was able to achieve



gold after presenting a remarkable and distinctive performance in the competition. Indian shooter Naraka Ajs won the silver medal (second place), while Qatari shooter Nasser Al-Attayah took the bronze medal. The president of the Kuwaiti Shooting Sports Club, Duaij Al-Otaibi, thanked His Highness the Crown Prince for supporting Kuwaiti athletes during his visit to China and attending the opening ceremony. Al-Otaibi dedicated the achievement to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the noble Kuwaiti people. — Agencies (See Page 16)

Indonesia bans social media transactions

JAKARTA: Indonesia has banned goods transactions on social media platforms in a new regulation, its trade minister said Wednesday, as Jakarta aims to rein in direct sales on major platforms it says are harming millions of small businesses. Calls had grown in recent months for a regulation governing social media and e-commerce, with offline sellers seeing their livelihoods threatened by the sale of cheaper products on TikTok Shop and other platforms.

Indonesia is one of the world's biggest markets for TikTok Shop and was the first to pilot the app's e-commerce arm. "Now, e-commerce cannot become social media. It is separated," Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan told a news conference in the capital, Jakarta, adding that the trade regulation came into force on Tuesday. Hasan said social commerce platforms would have a week to comply with the new rule. "Any government would protect local small businesses," he said, describing the regulation as a way to ensure "equality in business competition".

The regulation means social commerce companies are now "prohibited to facilitate payment transactions in its electronic system", according to the regulation document seen by AFP. "Social commerce can place ads like TV, but it mustn't be transactional. (They) can't open shop, can't directly sell," Hasan said, without mentioning TikTok by name. Companies that did not comply would be warned first and would finally have their license to do business in Indonesia revoked, he said.

Laws in the archipelago nation did not cover direct transactions through social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook or Instagram before the new regulation. The new regulation is yet another setback for TikTok, which has faced intense scrutiny in the United States and other nations in recent months over users' data security and the company's alleged ties to Beijing. "Other countries are banning, we don't, we're regulating," Hasan said. Indonesia is now the first country in the region to act against the platform's growing popularity in social media commerce.

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Kuwait-UAE new maritime route to boost commerce

KUWAIT: The new maritime trade route between Kuwait and the UAE will boost commercial exchange and strategic ties, said a state official on Wednesday. Speaking to the press while inaugurating the new route between Kuwait's Shuwaikh and the UAE's Khalifa ports, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Affairs Fahad Al-Shula said that the new route would shorten the transport period

for cargo and goods to one day instead of five days via land.

He indicated that the Interior Ministry, Kuwait Customs, and the Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) had agreed to coordinate on eliminating all obstacles facing the transportation of cargo. He tasked the KPA with signing deals and agreements with other GCC entities to ensure smooth commercial exchange and cooperation among countries in the region. On his part, Matar Al-Neyadi—the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait—said that cargo of fresh goods and foodstuffs would benefit highly from the new maritime route, affirming that the opening of the path would also have a positive impact on the cost of transportation. — KUNA (See Page 3)

100 killed as fire engulfs crowded Iraq wedding hall

QARAQOSH: At least 100 people were killed when a fire ripped through a crowded Iraqi wedding hall, officials said Wednesday, pointing to indoor fire-works as the likely cause for the blaze that sparked a panicked stampede for the exits. More than 150 people were injured by the flames, the choking smoke or in the crush to flee the reception hall, which was reduced to charred debris and piles of twisted furniture under a partially collapsed ceiling.

"I thought there had been an explosion," said Martin Idriss, 19, who

was working in the kitchen when the fire broke out Tuesday evening in the venue in the mainly Christian northern city of Qaraqosh. "The flames were devouring the whole hall," he said. "When I went back in, I saw the charred bodies of three children," he said, adding the venue's emergency exits had proved "inadequate" for the hundreds of guests trying to escape.

Early reports and unverified video footage online suggested flames shot up sparking flames that ignited ceiling decorations before the fire engulfed highly flammable construction materials. Health authorities "counted 100 dead and more than 150 injured in the fire at a marriage hall in Hamdaniyah", as the city is also known, Iraq's official INA news agency reported in what it called a "preliminary tally".

Continued on Page 6

North Korea releases US soldier Travis King

WASHINGTON: US soldier Travis King has been freed by North Korea, where he had been held since running across the border from the South in July, the White House said on Wednesday. North Korea's state news agency had made a surprise announcement just hours earlier that Pyongyang had decided to expel King, who crossed over during a sightseeing tour of the Demilitarized Zone.

The White House thanked Beijing for allowing the 23-year-old to leave through China, with officials saying King had now left Chinese airspace

after being handed over to US custody there. King was in "good health and good spirits" and looking forward to coming home, after heading to a US military airbase first, US officials added. "US officials have secured the return of Private Travis King from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in a statement.

Sullivan thanked Sweden, which acts as Washington's diplomatic liaison in Pyongyang, "and the government of the People's Republic of China for its assistance in facilitating the transit of Private King." Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder hailed the "hard work" of US military forces and the State Department in getting King home. After a drunken pub fight, an incident with police and a stay in South Ko-

rean jail, Private Second Class King was being taken to the airport in July to fly back to Texas.

But instead of travelling to Fort Bliss for disciplinary hearings, King snuck away, joined a Demilitarized Zone sightseeing trip and slipped over the border. Last month, Pyongyang confirmed it was holding the US soldier, saying King had defected to North Korea to escape "mistreatment and racial discrimination in the US Army".

But after completing its investigation, Pyongyang has "decided to expel Travis King, a soldier of the US Army who illegally intruded into the territory of the DPRK, under the law of the Republic", the Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday, using the North's formal name.

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KUWAIT: The first ship that passed through the new shipping line between Kuwait and the Emirates arrives at Shuwaikh port. — KUNA



AL-HAMDANIYAH: Mourners attend the funeral of victims who were killed when a fire ripped through a crowded wedding hall in the mainly Christian northern city of Qaraqosh on September 27, 2023. — AFP



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Sleep apnea: Breathing troubles during sleep

Disrupted sleep patterns can lead to multiple complications

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Lack of sleep can have detrimental effects on one's overall health and wellbeing. A common sleep-disturbing disorder is sleep apnea, a condition that disrupts regular breathing patterns during sleep, leading to fragmented and insufficient rest due to a deprivation of oxygen in the brain and body. Consequently, it causes multiple awakenings throughout the night. Kuwait Times interviewed Pulmonologist Dr Yousef Al-Ramzi to understand the implications of this disorder and the best suggested solutions for breathing troubles during sleep.



Dr Yousef Al-Ramzi

Dr Ramzi explained to Kuwait Times that sleep apnea is characterized by repeated pauses in breathing and intermittent gasping or loud snoring during sleep. "One of the main signs is snoring, particularly loud snoring or pauses in breathing that may be noticed by others around the person who suffers from this condition," he said. Such disruptions are often caused by the relaxation of throat muscles, resulting in the narrowing or complete closure of the airway.

According to Dr Ramzi, one of the most concern-



ing aspects of sleep apnea is its impact on overall health. The insufficient oxygen intake and disrupted sleep patterns associated with this disorder can lead to multiple complications, including cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. These conditions are commonly linked to untreated sleep apnea. The repeated strain on the cardiovascular system during episodes of blocked airways can contribute to the development or worsening of these conditions.

"Sleep apnea is indeed prevalent in individuals

who are overweight or obese. However, it can also occur in individuals who are not overweight, although it is less common. While obstructive sleep apnea is more common in adults, it can also affect children, especially those who are severely obese," he explained. Sleep apnea affects not only older individuals or those who are overweight. While age and obesity can contribute to the likelihood of developing sleep apnea, this condition can affect anyone.

This disorder can negatively affect one's daytime performance as well. "The patient struggles

with difficulty concentrating during the day and may also experience excessive daytime sleepiness," Dr Ramzi said. He then spoke about possible treatments: "Treatment involves the use of positive airway pressure devices that open the airway when it becomes blocked during sleep. In moderate to severe cases, there are specific devices that work to open the blocked airway during sleep, with the most important one being the continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device. It is considered the most successful method in treating this condition."

In my view

Effective tips to maintain peace, avoid conflicts



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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What is going on with us human beings? Is it the change in climate affecting our moods and attitudes? Are we under the influence of the El Nino effect? I know it has to do with the weather, but I wonder. I am saying this because of what I have been observing on the streets and in shopping malls. Every morning, I witness irrational actions by people of all education levels and social classes.

For instance, at a red light, a man in his 40s was driving a luxurious car at 8:15 am, attempting to bypass everyone, although it was impossible. He incessantly honked his horn to the extent that it sounded like he had a serious medical condition. When another man asked him if everything was alright, he nearly collided with him in a fit of rage.

Another incident involved an Asian driver who rear-ended another vehicle. Initially, he was polite and apologized for the accident. However, when he was asked to go to the police station, he suddenly became extremely angry, speaking in his native language, leaving everyone perplexed. The vehicle behind him, where I was, was blocked, and we couldn't move until the arrival of a police patrol. Interestingly, when the police arrived, the irate individual transformed into a timid and cooperative person.

The most amusing incident happened to me personally when a minibus driver collided with my stationary vehicle. His very first words to me were, "Will you please pay my fine?" I was quite surprised! And although he had been speaking fluent English with me, when we went to the police station to obtain a repair order, he feigned not understanding anything. These are just a few examples of numerous incidents that occur on the streets every day. Isn't it a fact that staying calm allows one to think logically, make clear decisions and avoid conflicts?

Back in 2021, Helen Dos Santos shared some effective tips for maintaining peace of mind and avoiding conflicts in our busy lives. She said: "Everyone faces the harsh challenges in life, and to thrive in our ever-changing world, we need to find a sense of calmness and patience. It can be challenging to stay calm at times, but it's essential to try." (1) Staying calm allows you to think clearly. (2) It promotes discussions over fights. (3) You become more aware and focused. (4) It gives you time to prepare before speaking. (5) It leaves a positive impression. (6) A smile can defuse negativity and aggressive behavior, so please stay calm.

Anti-corruption bodies convene

CAIRO: Representatives of the anti-corruption agencies in the Arab countries met on Tuesday to discuss the implementation of the Arab conventions approved in 2010 in this regard. In a statement, Maha Bakhit, the head of the Arab League's legal affairs department, said the representatives held a meeting at the League's headquarters as part of the gatherings designed to follow up on the optimal implementation of these conventions.

The issue of combating corruption is of top priority as it has a negative impact on development in Arab countries, she stressed. Bakhit referred to the keenness of the Arab countries to fight corruption

through their available mechanisms. The meeting is part of the preparations of the Arab states to partake in the tenth session of the UN Convention against Corruption due in October, she said. The gathering discussed the reports of the states parties to the Arab conventions against corruption and the recommendations made by the team tasked with reviewing the optimal implementation of the treaties.

Kuwait committed

A delegation from the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), led by its chief, Nawaf Al-Mahamel, took part in the meeting. Nawaf Al-Mahamel, vice president of the Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha), said on Tuesday that Kuwait has been committed to implementing all Arab and international conventions against corruption. Speaking to KUNA after a meeting held earlier on following the imple-

mentation of the Arab treaty to combat corruption, Al-Mahamel said Nazaha is keen on benefiting from the countries' experiments in fighting corruption.

Kuwait's pledge to all international, Arab and regional conventions is based on its keenness on fighting all types of corruption, he noted. Kuwait has effectively participated in the meetings held on the Islamic, international and Arab levels to fight corruption, he said. Today's meeting focused on two issues: implementing the Arab Convention against corruption and reviewing the experiments of member states in this regard, he pointed out.

Some reports on the commitment of the state parties to the Arab Convention were submitted during the meeting, Al-Mahamel said. In addition, he said that the conferees shed light on combating corruption and the latest legal developments on recovering assets and public funds stolen, as well as others. —KUNA

KCCI, British delegation discuss opportunities and partnership

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) organized a meeting on Tuesday with a British delegation to discuss investment opportunities and commercial partnerships between the two sides. Dherar Al-Ghanim said the meeting included the UK Ambassador to the country, Belinda Lewis, who led the delegation and Awal Fuseini, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's Halal Sector Senior Manager.

Al-Ghanim noted that such meetings have a positive impact on boosting economic cooperation, lauding the historic ties between Kuwait and the UK's economy. Britain is one of Kuwait's main trading partners, with a total exchange volume of 640 million pounds in 2021, he said. He stressed the importance of making more efforts to increase the volume of trade exchange between the two friendly countries.

Meanwhile, Lewis said these gatherings aim to offer commercial and investment opportunities available in the UK and discuss establishing some possible



Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, British delegation discuss investment opportunities, partnership. — KUNA

projects in the two countries. She expressed her satisfaction about cooperation between the two sides, referring to the UK's great interest in increasing collaboration with Kuwait in all domains. Fuseini thanked the chamber for organizing the meeting, which created a chance for entrepreneurs from both sides.

He elaborated that there are several huge possibilities in the two countries, urging all investors to put in hard work to enhance commercial ex-

change and set up investment projects. He made a presentation on the UK meat sector and noticed that Britain is the third-largest exporter of meat in the world. Furthermore, Reem Al-Fulaj, Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Kuwait Food and Nutrition Public Authority, stressed keenness on the safety of all types of food that are in line with all standards approved by international organizations and agencies. — KUNA

German official lauds Kuwait-Germany ties

BERLIN: The State Minister at the German Federal Foreign Office, Tobias Lindner, has lauded the "strong" bilateral relations between Germany and Kuwait during a bilateral meeting with the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Germany, Najeb Abdul Rahman Al-Bader, in Berlin. Lindner emphasized that the strong relations between the two parties are based on the foundations of friendship and common interests, noting the success of joint coordination on many regional and international issues.

He also appreciated the distinguished and ongoing role played by Ambassador Al-Bader in strengthening relations at the bilateral and multilateral levels and his keenness to continue and deepen relations, according to a statement to Kuwait News

Agency (KUNA). On his part, Ambassador Al-Bader told KUNA that he discussed with Lindner a range of issues of interest, including joint developments in regional and international situations.

He expressed his gratitude to the German leadership and to all officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and German institutions in various sectors for their cooperation and support during his five-year diplomatic tenure in Germany. Both Lindner and Al-Bader praised the mutual concern based on fruitful cooperation and constructive dialogue that contributed to enhancing understanding and exchanging experiences on many common issues.

They emphasized that this cooperation contributed to putting into practice the directives of the political leadership in the State of Kuwait and its priorities regarding the consolidation of bilateral relations and the development of mutual interests. This meeting coincided with the conclusion of Ambassador Al-Bader's diplomatic missions in Berlin. — KUNA



State Minister at the German Federal Foreign Office, Tobias Lindner meets with the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Germany, Najeb Abdul Rahman Al-Bader. — KUNA

Kuwait takes part in IAEA 67th conference

VIENNA: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has launched the work of the 67th General Conference to discuss limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, ways to make the Middle East a nuclear weapon-free zone, and enhancing the safe use of atomic energy. Kuwait is participating in the five-day conference with a delegation headed by its Ambassador to Austria and its Permanent Representative to the UN and international organizations in Vienna, Talal Al-Fassam, and the Acting Director of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Dr. Manea Al-Sudairawi.

Arab countries had submitted a request to the Agency's General Secretariat to include the Zionist

entity's nuclear capabilities on the agenda, which they had frequently presented during previous sessions, to stress the necessary measures that must be taken to place the nuclear facilities under the Agency's safeguards and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The General Conference is scheduled to consider several draft resolutions related to strengthening international cooperation in the fields of nuclear safety, radiation safety, transport safety, and waste, in addition to enhancing the effectiveness of the safeguards system and implementing the Additional Protocol.

According to the agenda of the 67th session, Egypt is scheduled to present its own draft resolution on implementing the agency's safeguards system in the Middle East. On the sidelines of the session, a scientific forum will be organized on September 26 and 27 under the title (Nuclear Innovations for Net Zero. In four sessions held over two days, leading international experts will highlight the

role of new nuclear reactors in future energy production and discuss the use of nuclear technology to avoid greenhouse gases in industrial applications and other fields.

Representatives from member states of the Agency, institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as international organizations including the World Health Organization and the International Food and Agriculture Organization, will discuss innovations' importance in supporting nuclear development.

The Kuwaiti delegation includes Counselor Bashar Al-Duwaisan from the Permanent Delegation of Kuwait to the UN and international organizations in Vienna, the National Liaison Officer at the IAEA, Dr. Nader Al-Awadi, the Third Secretary, Dr. Sara Al-Ajmi, and the Third Secretary, Rehab Al-Farhan, in addition to Diplomatic Attache Abdulaziz Ibrahim from International Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. — KUNA

Plastic waste poses major environmental challenges

GCC generates around 10 million tons of plastic waste annually

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Plastic waste is a global issue that poses significant environmental challenges, and it costs billions of dollars worldwide to develop solutions for reducing and recycling plastic waste. The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) estimates that the GCC generates around 10 million tons of plastic waste annually, yet the potential for plastics recycling in the Arabian Gulf region remains largely untapped.

This ongoing issue has dire consequences, with countless wildlife, both on land and in the sea, succumbing to the ingestion of non-biodegradable plastics that take centuries to decompose. Regrettably, some individuals around the world fail to grasp the urgency of this issue in maintaining the shared habitat of various creatures.

Kuwait Times spoke to people in Kuwait to gather their suggestions for reducing plastic waste in the country and encouraging proac-

tive participation in addressing this problem. The respondents provided valuable suggestions for tackling this issue collectively, from businesses to educational institutions, while also promoting greater awareness and responsibility among the population.

Waleed Saab, an active environmental activist, emphasized the importance of collective action in confronting this issue, despite Kuwait's status as a developed country that is committed to international efforts to combat plastic waste. He called for increased social responsibility from local companies in Kuwait and cited cafes as an example of businesses that can make a significant impact. Saab proposed that cafes incentivize customers to use reusable cups by offering discounts. This approach not only reduces plastic waste but also raises awareness among various segments of the population.

Fajer Othman, a parent, recognized the role of schools in educating children about the plastic waste issue, but also advocated for taking chil-

dren to places like the Scientific Center to actively participate. She mentioned the center's initiative of collecting empty plastic bottles in a large basket, highlighting the importance of hands-on involvement. Othman suggested that schools and educational institutions intensify their informative and awareness campaigns on plastic waste and organize field trips to contaminated areas to enhance students' understanding of the issue.

Several well-known food and beverage establishments in Kuwait have taken steps to address the problem. Some have replaced plastic straws with eco-friendly alternatives, while others have launched campaigns encouraging customers to use their own cups instead of disposable ones. Unfortunately, the latter initiative did not gain widespread attention. Teenager Ahlam Abdullah expressed her personal commitment to environmental preservation, instilled by her parents' guidance. She urged companies to adopt new strategies promoting the use of environmentally friendly materials in their industries.



Matar Al-Neyadi, UAE Ambassador to Kuwait



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Fahad Al-Shula inaugurates the new shipping line between Kuwait and United Arab Emirates. — KUNA photos

Kuwait-UAE shipping route enhances trade exchange, relations

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Communications Fahad Al-Shula said that "the inauguration of the shipping line between the state of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates is very important and strategic" and contributes to the consolidation of historical relations and the promotion of trade exchange between the two brotherly countries.

This was stated in a press statement by Minister Al-Shula on Wednesday during a reception ceremony for the inauguration of the maritime shipping line between Khalifa Port and Shuwaikh Port in the presence of the UAE Ambassador to the country, Dr Matar Al-Neyadi, and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant General Anwar Al-Borges.



Al-Shula explained that the new line will contribute to shortening the shipping time to only one day, unlike the previous land transport, which took five days. He said that it was agreed with the Ministry of Interior, the General Administration of Customs, and the Kuwait Ports Corporation to overcome all obstacles to the shipping line, pointing to the directive (ports) to sign agreements and memoranda of understanding with the GCC coun-

tries in this regard in order to increase trade exchange and cooperation between countries for the benefit of citizens.

The ship was docked at Shuwaikh Port on Wednesday morning, launching the service of the sea freight line between Khalifa Port in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait for the transportation of vehicles and rolled goods (which are not transported by containers). — KUNA

Hospital successfully performs a complex and rare surgery

KUWAIT: Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital announced the success of the vascular unit in performing a complex catheterization operation for a 65-year-old patient who is suffering from an 8-centimeter aortic arch dilation. "It is one of the most complex and rare arterial catheterization operations ever performed," the head of the vascular unit at the hospital, consultant vascular surgery and arterial catheterization Dr Ahmed Amir, said in a press statement on Wednesday.

The operation is one of the very complex operations to replace the entire aortic arch and the arteries branching from it to the brain and hands through catheterization with limited intervention. Amir point-

ed out that such cases need a special stent that fits the patient's artery sizes, which takes 6-8 weeks to manufacture and is processed and tested in stages until it reaches the patient assigned. He pointed out that this type of technology is advanced and is intended for limited hospitals around the world. The hospital began using branched stents in 2020 until it used the latest international technologies in the field of branched aortic arch catheterization.

He explained that these operations are carried out with the collective effort of an integrated team of vascular surgeons, cardiologists, anesthesiologists, intensive care physicians, and nephrologists to discuss the appropriate treatment plan to avoid any complications. He stated that the hospital is proud of its achievement to become one of the first accredited centers in the Middle East to rely on this procedure, which came after various successes in less complicated aortic aneurysms.

He pointed out that the use of the latest technologies around the world in the field of cardiac surgery contributes to reducing the sending of patients



KUWAIT: A team of surgeons, cardiologists, anesthesiologists and experts successfully performs a complex and rare surgery. — KUNA

for treatment abroad, expressing his hope that the hospital will be a regional center in the Middle East for the treatment of aortic aneurysms. — KUNA

Congratulatory message



LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait, the retail division of the LuLu Group International, sent flowers to Kuwait Times on Wednesday on the occasion of its 62nd anniversary.

MoH launches winter vaccination campaign

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday launched the winter vaccinations campaign (seasonal flu and vaccination against bacterial pneumonia) for the 2023-2024 season at the Al-Rawda Health Center in the presence of the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi, and a number of Ministry officials. The ministry's assistant undersecretary for Public Health Affairs, Dr Munther Al-Hasawi, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the campaign was launched in more than 50 health centers distributed across all regions of Kuwait, pointing out that the focus will be on flu vaccinations and pneumonia, which are frequent in the winter season.

He stressed the importance of receiving vaccinations, especially for those who have risk factors such as obesity, asthma, other respiratory diseases, and diabetes, explaining that vaccination will reduce the severity of the disease, the number of days of transmission, and complications. Dr Al-Hasawi pointed out the Ministry's keenness to provide vaccinations that are sufficient for all the target groups, adding that if there is a need for more vaccinations, the Ministry will provide them. He explained that there are many types of respiratory viruses, but vaccination protects against the fierce types, pointing to the availability of grafts in all vaccination centers.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Ministry of Health launches the winter vaccinations campaign for the 2023-2024 season at the Al-Rawda Health Center in the presence of the Minister of Health, Dr Ahmad Al-Awadi, and a number of Ministry officials. — KUNA

For his part, the director of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Health District and the acting director of the Capital Health District, Dr Walid Al-Busairi, stressed in a similar statement the importance of the initiative to receive vaccination. He explained that vaccination reduces the likelihood of infection and, in the event of infection, reduces its complications and reduces hospitalization due to complications. He said that the campaign includes the provision of seasonal flu vaccinations and vaccinations against acute bacterial pneumonia. Dr Al-Busairi pointed to the safety of influenza vaccination and the positive impact of winter vaccination campaigns on reducing the number of cases. — KUNA

In my view

Stop discrimination against expatriates



By Nejouad Al-Yagout

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As per an article in Kuwait Times, the National Assembly Speaker has submitted a draft law "calling to stop the appointment of expats in government jobs unless there are no Kuwaitis to occupy the post" (<https://kuwaittimes.com/bid-to-curb-expat-hirings/>). In other words, even if a qualified expatriate applies for a job, his/her application will be rejected unless they cannot fill the space with a local.

Here is yet the latest attempt to discriminate against expatriates in our country. Again, our country is facing many problems and yet we choose to focus on nationalization as an attempt to turn Kuwait into an insular society in which Kuwaitis are treated as superior to others. Another alarming aspect of the draft law is Article 2: "The draft law stipulates that the monthly salary and remunerations granted given to expats must not be more than those offered to Kuwaitis occupying the same job." So even if an expatriate is more competent in a job, a Kuwaiti will be paid more or the same!

Employment discrimination is a serious issue. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines employment discrimination as "unfair treatment because of your race, color, religion, sex ... national origin, disability, age (age 40 or older), or genetic information" (<https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/what-employment-discrimination>). If this draft law is not a prime example of employment discrimination, then what is? In Kuwait's case, it seems as though politicians have nothing else to do but point fingers at expatriates and break up families and tighten our borders. We know that without expatriates our country would collapse, but our nationalism trumps both our sense of logic and any remaining shred of humanity we feign to hold onto.

In many other countries, expatriates would have the right to sue the government or their workplace for discriminating against them because of their nationality. But that would be impossible in our country, because expatriates may get fired or deported. And much of the population will judge an expatriate harshly for voicing discontent. How often have we heard: If they don't like it, they can leave. So who protects expatriates in Kuwait? Even when local human rights organizations condemn the actions of decision-makers, how much power do activists hold when they cannot succeed in taming the demons of nationalists?

Although this draft law is only confined to government jobs, let's be honest. When we go to ministries, most of our paperwork is done by expatriates. An expatriate in Kuwait takes his/her job seriously, because, unlike a Kuwaiti, they cannot afford to close their office for a tea break or take countless days off from work. When we go to work to get things done, we don't care whether a Kuwaiti does our work or not. We just want the job done. What matters in the workforce is whether a person is qualified or not. Our nationality is just another label separating us, giving those in power an excuse to ostracize and discriminate against the so-called other.

We wait for the day when those in power stop ranting against expatriates and do something to address the serious issues in our country: our infrastructure, our failing education system, the way our closed borders is affecting tourism, our regression in the field of arts and culture, and the fact that we continue to fare low on the happiness index. Perhaps when we address our own issues, we will realize that our problem is not expatriates. We are the problem.

News in Brief

Saudi approves railway link

RIYADH: The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gave the green light on Tuesday to the railroad linkage project with Kuwait. The agreement on the project was approved during a Cabinet meeting held in NEOM City under the chairmanship of Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, according to the Saudi Press Agency. — KUNA

Online hajj registration

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs said the central registration for the 2024 hajj (pilgrimage) season will be available via the Awqaf gateway app between Sunday, October 1, and Friday, November 10. Following the end of the registration period, the Ministry will start weighing the applications against the previously-set requirements to make sure of the entitled applicants, spokesman Salman Al-Kandari said. The travel agencies, accredited by the Ministry as hajj organizers, are scheduled to take part in an exhibition ahead of the hajj trips, he noted. The exhibition aims to help pilgrims select the travel agency that best suits their needs, and then the pilgrims will have to pay 25 percent of the costs of the trip as a down payment to make sure that their registration is valid, Al-Kandari added. — KUNA

Arab Leagues support Sudanese

CAIRO: Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit of the Arab League on Tuesday called on Arab organizations to continue supporting the war-devastated Sudanese people. "We will continue to offer assistance to the Sudanese people as long as the crisis rages," Abul-Gheit vowed at a special meeting of the Arab unions for supporting the Sudanese people. He hailed the Arab countries' aid to the Sudan and demanded the warring parties cease hostilities to end the suffering of the Sudanese people. He regretted the devastating impact of the war on Sudanese people, especially women, children, and the elderly, and all Sudanese cities, as well as the education and health facilities and services. For his part, Sudan's delegate to the Arab League, Mohammad Khalis, condemned the systemic attacks of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on all the state institutions, particularly the economic and service facilities, as well as its violations against Sudanese people, which tantamount to "war crimes and war against humanity". — KUNA

Kuwait team, volunteers assist earthquake-stricken Morocco



Kuwait Red Crescent Society officials participate in 'Fazaat Al-Maghreb' campaign. — KUNA photos

MARRAKECH: Kuwaiti relief personnel and volunteers remain stationed in the quake-demolished regions in the heights of the Atlas Mountains, aiding the stricken populace and consoling the bereaved who have lost loved ones. Under the logo, "Fazaat Al-Maghreb," personnel of the Kuwait Red Crescent and Kuwaiti charities have flown thousands of kilometers from their home country, Kuwait, "the center of humanitarian action," reaching the quake-demolished regions.

The earthquake that left heavy damage in the Al-Hoz region claimed 3,000 lives and injured a large number of people. Staff of the Kuwait Embassy in Morocco, upon instructions from the political leadership, have been involved in the relief operation, assessing the needs and participating in blood donations for the wounded. Ambassador Abdulatif Al-Yahya, along with Kuwaiti citizens residing in Morocco, have also been engaged in efforts to soothe the victims' plights. — KUNA



Kuwait Red Crescent Society official meets Moroccans who fled their quake demolished region.

GCC and Iran rapprochement offers stability

DUBAI: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jasem Al-Budaiwi, affirmed that a GCC-Iranian rapprochement, based on neighborliness, noninterference in the domestic affairs of other countries, and abidance by international treaties, serves regional stability. He, however, warned that the recent Houthis attack on Bahraini forces stationed on the Saudi-Yemeni borders risks pushing this rapprochement back-

ward. Al-Budaiwi hoped Iran would understand the need to have normal relations with its neighbors based on good neighborliness principles.

In a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian a few days ago, he confirmed that his country is willing to have these normal relations with the GCC member states. The GCC chief estimated the annual growth rate of the GCC states at 6 percent. The six GCC members make up the world's eighth-largest economy, with a GDP of up to \$2.4 trillion, he added. He expected that the GDP of the GCC member states would jump to \$6 trillion by 2050, their sovereign funds would reach \$3,225 billion, and the pan-GCC trade would hit \$107 billion. — KUNA



Secretary General of the (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi talks about GCC-Iranian rapprochement. — KUNA

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Kuwait Fire Force's squads battle the blaze that ripped through wood stores in Shuwaikh Industrial. — KUNA photos

Firefighters battle fire in Shuwaikh

KUWAIT: Five squads of the Kuwait Fire Force contained a fire that ripped through wood stores in the Shuwaikh industrial region on Wednesday. KFF said in a statement that the department was alerted early today about a fire that broke out at carpentry stores in the area. Firefighters scrambled to the region and managed to extinguish the blazes that were raging at four stores. No substantial damage was reported. The fire department urged managers of factories, commercial buildings, and investment buildings to take the necessary measures against fires. — KUNA





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Humanitarian crisis looming in Armenia

Hundreds left homeless after fleeing Azerbaijan's control



GORIS: Refugees stand next to their car on Sept 27, 2023. — AFP photos



GORIS: Refugees look on as they wait near a Red Cross registration center in Goris, on Sept 26, 2023.

GORIS: Armenia said Wednesday that nearly half of Nagorno-Karabakh's population has fled the enclave since Azerbaijan crushed the rebels' decades-long fight for an independent state last week. Yerevan's attempts to absorb the sea of homeless and hungry ethnic Armenians come with officials still trying to identify the whereabouts of more than 100 people reported missing in a fuel depot blast Monday that claimed 68 lives.

The fireball erupted as refugees from the rebel enclave of Azerbaijan were stocking up on fuel for the long drive along the lone mountain road leading to Armenia. The Armenian government said more than 50,000 refugees had entered since Azerbaijan lifted its nine-month blockade on the enclave on Sunday. Some of the refugees at the border told AFP that they were urged to leave by the separatist authorities.

That represents nearly half of the region's estimated 120,000 population and marks a fundamental shift in ethnic control of lands that had been disputed by mostly Christian Armenians and predominantly Muslim Azerbaijanis for the past century. It also adds to the economic strains of Armenia — a landlocked Caucasus country with few natural resources and emerging problems with longstanding diplomatic and military partnership with Russia.

Pensioner Alekhan Hambardzumyan was one of hundreds of people trying to survive on the streets

of Armenia's mountaintop village of Goris after fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh this week. Goris has become the main destination point for the families fleeing their hometowns in beat up Soviet-era Ladas and farm vehicles. The golden-toothed 72-year-old was spending nights in a shelled-out van and grieving the loss of his son in last week's fighting. "I want to go to Yerevan," Hambardzumyan told AFP. "But I don't know what the state can offer me."

Humanitarian crisis

The Armenian government said it had prepared living arrangements for 40,000 families after last week's fighting broke out. But Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's spokeswoman said late Tuesday that the government had so far been able to find housing for just 2,850 people.

The looming humanitarian crisis poses a political problem for Pashinyan. The opposition agreed to end six days of anti-government protests on Tuesday to allow officials to focus on helping the displaced. The opposition is also fractured and lacks a single figure who can challenge Pashinyan. But analysts say the opposition is being spearheaded by Moscow and Nagorno-Karabakh supporters who have roots in the region.

Their anger could rise after Azerbaijan's detention of Ruben Vardanyan — a Nagorno-Karabakh busi-

nessman who headed the separatist government from November 2022 until February — while he was trying to enter Armenia on Wednesday. "The influx of refugees will have a serious impact on the domestic political situation in Armenia," independent political analyst Boris Navasardyan told AFP.

Burn victims

The Red Cross and the United Nations' refugees agency are trying to organize immediate help. But Russia is working hand-in-hand with Azerbaijani forces and focused on disarming the separatists under the terms of a ceasefire reached last Wednesday. The separatists reported the death of 213 people in the one-day fight and Azerbaijan put its toll at 192 soldiers and one civilian killed.

Moscow is now firing daily barbs at Pashinyan for his vow Sunday to pivot away from Armenia's long-standing alliance with the Kremlin. Pashinyan has blamed Russia for failing to avert the Azerbaijani offensive and called Armenia's current foreign security alliances "ineffective" and "insufficient". The comments underscored the extent to which the Kremlin's influence has shrunk across former Soviet republics since it became bogged down in its war on Ukraine.

But Moscow still has an important military base in Armenia and has indicated that it will try to keep Yerevan in its sphere of influence. Russia's foreign

ministry said on Wednesday that Moscow expected "all agreements on developing bilateral cooperation ... to continue to be implemented" in full.

'I decided to act'

Much of the immediate international aid from organizations such as the Red Cross is being channeled to helping the burn victims of Monday's catastrophic blast. The explosion happened while hundreds of people were scrambling to get access to the limited supplies of fuel still available in the region after Azerbaijan's blockade. Azerbaijan waved through about 20 Red Cross ambulances on Tuesday and allowed Armenia to ferry some of the victims by helicopter to a burn clinic in Yerevan. The blast injured 290 people in all. But officials said on Tuesday that 105 remained unaccounted for and some of the victims were still fighting for their lives.

The simultaneous crises have prompted an outpouring of support of the refugees among Armenian civil society groups and regular village residents such as Liana Sakhakyan. The Goris native set up a table laden with cakes in front of her house to feed the hungry masses. "When I saw so many people arriving yesterday, I decided to act," she said. "The important thing is not just the food; it's the welcome, a warm atmosphere. This is what the displaced people of (Nagorno-Karabakh) must feel." — AFP

Mysterious antimatter observed falling down for first time

PARIS: For the first time, scientists have observed antimatter particles — the mysterious twins of the visible matter all around us — falling downwards due to the effect of gravity, Europe's physics lab CERN announced on Wednesday. The experiment was hailed as "huge milestone", though most physicists anticipated the result, and it had been predicted by Einstein's 1915 theory of relativity.

It definitively rules out that gravity repels antimatter upwards — a finding that would have upended our fundamental understanding of the universe. Around 13.8 billion years ago, the Big Bang is believed to have produced an equal amount of matter — what everything you can see is made out of — and antimatter, its equal yet opposite counterpart.

However, there is virtually no antimatter in the universe, which prompted one of the greatest mysteries of physics: what happened to all the antimatter? "Half the universe is missing," said Jeffrey Hangst, a member of CERN's ALPHA collaboration in Geneva which conducted the new experiment. "In principle, we could build a universe — everything that we know about — with only antimatter, and it would work in exactly the same way," he told AFP.

Physicists believe that matter and antimatter did meet and almost entirely destroyed each other after the Big Bang. Yet matter now makes up nearly five percent of the universe — the rest is even less

understood dark matter and dark energy — while antimatter vanished.

Newton's apple flying up

One of the key outstanding questions about antimatter was whether gravity caused it to fall in the same way as normal matter. While most physicists believed that it did, a few had speculated otherwise.

A falling apple famously inspired Isaac Newton's work on gravity — but if that apple was made of antimatter, would it have shot up into the sky? And if gravity did in fact repel antimatter, it could have meant that impossibilities such as a perpetual motion machine were possible. "So why not drop some and see what happens?" Hangst said.

He compared the experiment to Galileo's famous — though likely apocryphal — 16th-century demonstration that two balls of different mass dropped from the Leaning Tower of Pisa would fall at the same rate. But this experiment — the result of 30 years of work on antimatter at CERN — was "a little bit more involved" than Galileo's, Hangst said. One problem was that antimatter barely exists outside of rare, short-lived particles in outer space. However in 1996, CERN scientists produced the first atoms of antimatter — antihydrogen. Another challenge was that, because matter and antimatter have an opposite electrical charge, the moment they meet they destroy each other in a violent flash of energy scientists call annihilation.

A magnetic trap

To study gravity's effect on antimatter, the ALPHA team constructed a 25-centimetre-long (10-inch) bottle placed on its end, with magnets at the top and bottom. Late last year, the scientists placed

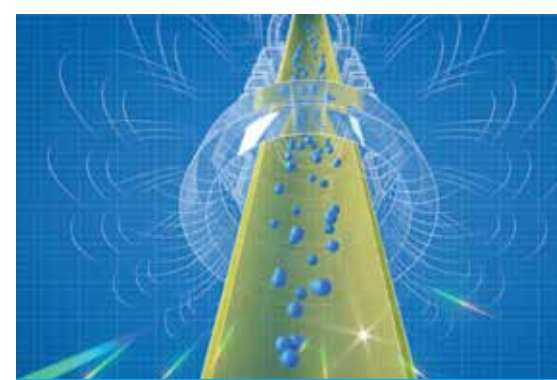
people and injuring 150 others. By all accounts, the fire spread at a rapid rate.

Footage shared on social media showed indoor fireworks flaring so high that they set ceiling decorations alight. On Wednesday, one by one, around 20 coffins covered in satin or bouquets of flowers were carried through the crowd on the shoulders of men. They were followed by women in tears, all dressed in black and supported on either side as they were barely able to stand up on their own.

Crowds swarm cemetery

Samira, a 53-year-old housewife, came to bury 15 members of her family, "from the father to the youngest child, aged four", she said in a melancholy tone. "We still have to bury a man and his two twin daughters. They're dead but we haven't recovered the bodies," she added. Other burials are planned in the coming days.

She paused and took a deep breath, saying:



This handout illustration released by US National Science Foundation on Sept 27, 2023, shows an anti-matter gravity experiment ALPHA-g at an undisclosed location. — AFP

around 100 very cold antihydrogen atoms into this "magnetic trap" called ALPHA-g.

As they turned down the strength of both magnets, the antihydrogen particles — which were bouncing around at 100 meters a second — were able to escape out either end of the bottle. The scientists then simply counted how much antimatter was annihilated at each end of the bottle. Around 80 percent of the antihydrogen went out of the bottom, which is a similar rate to how regular bouncing hydrogen atoms would behave if they were in the bottle.

This result, published in the journal Nature, shows that gravity causes antimatter to fall downwards, as predicted by Einstein's 1915 theory of relativity. In more than a dozen experiments, the CERN scientists varied the strength of the magnets, observing gravity's effect on antimatter at different rates. — AFP

"That's enough, I can't talk any more". But she continued anyway. "There's no sentiment possible; we're all dead," the 50-year-old said. "There isn't a single person who hasn't lost a family member or a friend."

The crowd that swarmed the cemetery chanted "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" before singing liturgical hymns. When approached by journalists, several people refused to comment. In front of the family vaults lining the cemetery lanes, men and women wept loudly and let out cries of anguish. One woman knelt to kiss the portrait of a young woman.

The civil defense said the reception hall had been fitted with prefabricated panels that were "highly flammable and contravened safety standards". They caught fire immediately on contact with indoor fireworks. The panicked guests were caught in a stampede and unable to escape in time from the hall, which the civil defense said lacked sufficient emergency exits. — AFP

Germany tightens border checks to curb migration

BERLIN: Germany said Wednesday it would step up policing of its borders with Poland and the Czech Republic, in a bid to get a grip on rising levels of illegal migration. Federal police would "carry out additional flexible, targeted controls on the (people) smuggling routes" along its eastern border, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told journalists.

The surge in arrivals has reignited the immigration debate in Germany, put pressure on Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government and caused tensions with European neighbors facing their own influx. The new controls would be implemented "this week" to reinforce forces already patrolling the border area, Faeser said. "My goal is to put maximum pressure on smugglers and to protect people," she said.

Germany has already increased the number of police carrying out search operations in the border area in recent months, as numbers began to rise. Between January and August this year, federal police detected 70,753 irregular entries into Germany, a nearly 60-percent increase on the same period last year. The number of requests for asylum also rose by around 77 percent, with over 204,000 applications made, according to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

Faeser recently raised the possibility of implementing fixed controls along the border with Poland and the Czech Republic, a measure already in place along the boundary between Germany and Austria. All are members of the European Union and of Europe's Schengen open-borders zone. The reintroduction of border checks in the Schengen Area is permitted only in exceptional circumstances and must be notified with Brussels before it can be implemented.

Faeser said she did not "rule out" imposing fixed controls in future if the new measures did not prove effective enough. The moveable controls would not however need to be notified with the European Union, Faeser said. She had received the necessary go-ahead from her Czech counterpart and said she hoped to get the same approval from Poland at a meeting of European interior ministers in Brussels on Thursday. Immigration will be at the top of the agenda for the talks, as member states wrangle over who has responsibility for new arrivals and how to better insulate the EU's borders. "I am very optimistic that we will reach an agreement shortly, because everyone involved is aware of how important a European solution is," Faeser said. — AFP

'We're all dead': Iraqis in shock after wedding fire

QARAQOSH: A huge portrait of Jesus Christ dominates the crowd, which parts to make way for a stream of coffins after a fire tore through an Iraqi Christian wedding. At the cemetery in the northern city of Qaraqosh, mourners gathered around the clergy from various churches, chanting prayers in Syriac and delivering sermons in Arabic. Some of the faithful held up portraits of deceased loved ones.

The day before, those in the pictures had gathered in an elegant banquet hall to attend a wedding. But as the bride and groom danced, a fire erupted in the reception hall, killing at least 100

International

A migrant rest stop in Panama after brutal crossing of the Darien Gap



BAJO CHIQUITO: Aerial view showing migrants walking through the jungle near Bajo Chiquito village, the first border control of the Darien Province in Panama, on September 22, 2023. — AFP photos

BAJO CHIQUITO: Once Marcel Maldonado had finally made it across, he broke down in tears. The Venezuelan migrant, limping on a prosthetic leg, had survived the infamous trek through the Darien jungle from Colombia and, having crossed the Tuquesa River, he was now in Panama.

Perched on the riverside is Bajo Chiquito, the first Panamanian village where migrants - some 3,000 a day, most of them Venezuelans, many with children - arrive after the tortuous journey northward. Most are headed to the US and, they hope, a better life.

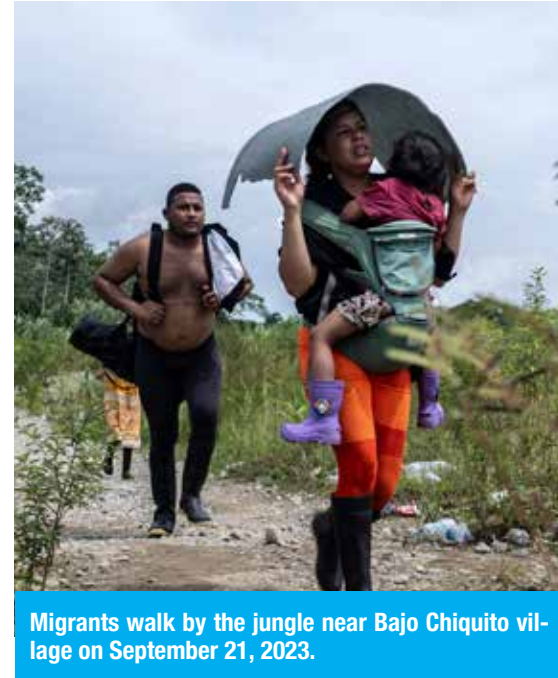
After an exhausting slog of three to five days across the Darien Gap, they reach the village under crushing heat, but cheered by the prospect of a hot meal and a safe place to sleep - even if it is under the stars. NGOs like the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders are there to help. The migrants had survived the natural obstacles of the jungle - the rivers, torrential rain, treacherous climbs and cliffs - but also the criminal gangs who often rob, kidnap or rape them.

Maldonado lost his right leg in a motorcycle accident 10 years ago but has not let that stop his quest for a better life. "The only thing I want is to let my parents spend their last years with at least something to eat," the 30-year-old Venezuelan told AFP. "That is my dream." Otherwise, he added, "I would not be here. Because this is terrible."

'Risky but necessary'

The Darien jungle, 165 miles (265 kilometers) long, has become a necessary, if hugely trying, passage for thousands of migrants from South America trying to reach the US via Central America and Mexico. Most of them are Venezuelans, but there are also Ecuadorans, Haitians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Afghans and even Africans from Cameroon or Burkina Faso.

"It's very dangerous. There are rapes and all the rest," Reina Torres told AFP. The 77-year-old Venezuelan had crossed the jungle with 12 family members. The trip is "very dangerous, risky, but



Migrants walk by the jungle near Bajo Chiquito village on September 21, 2023.

necessary," added Mechu Falceinord, a 28-year-old Haitian who had come from French Guyana. "My dream is to work, to have money, to be independent, to have a house, a dog, a child." In Bajo Chiquito, police search new arrivals and confiscate any potential weapons, while officials register everyone's personal information.

Robbed of everything

Nearly 390,000 migrants have entered Panama via the Darien Gap so far this year, up sharply from last year's 248,000, Panamanian officials say. In 2008, the first year arrivals were tallied, there were only 28. From Bajo Chiquito, migrants can pay \$25 each to be taken in long canoes on a three-hour trip up the Tuquesa to Lajas Blancas. From there, they can take buses to the Costa Rican border.

When they first emerge from the Darien jungle, many migrants say the gangs robbed them of everything. Nazaret Puerta, a 28-year-old Venezuelan,



Venezuelan migrant Marcel Maldonado (30) walks after crossing the Tuquesa River, near the village of Bajo Chiquito on September 21, 2023.

said her group was held hostage for eight hours. The passage took four days for a migrant from Burkina Faso. "The forest was dangerous," said the man, who identified himself only as Utsman. "We had no water to drink, there was no food."

'Trail of trash'

Migrants making the grueling trek have left a trail of trash, casting aside items no longer needed or too heavy to carry: boots, plastic bottles, toothbrushes, diapers. The castoffs line the banks of the Tuquesa. Residents of Bajo Chiquito have opened food stands, they rent hammocks and camping sites, and they offer charging stations and Internet access to the migrants.

But for Panama, the flood of arrivals poses a security problem. "Three hundred ninety thousand just this year," said regional police chief Edgar Pitti Valdes. "This massive influx of migrants is upsetting people's normal lives." — AFP

'We are penniless': Migrants bled dry on path through Darien Gap

ACANDI: At the start of the perilous jungle trek through the Darien Gap to Panama, uniformed workers on the Colombian side hand out colored wristbands to migrants, like bouncers at a nightclub, to indicate what "services" they have paid for. The minimum of \$170 gets you a guide for the treacherous journey from South America to Central America, as well as medical care and toilet access.

If you can't afford that, your wristband indicates you must wait until you have the money - or manage to negotiate a group discount - to move on from the camp set up by a self-styled "community organization" made up of residents of Acandi, a small town on the Colombian side of the infamous rainforest ordeal.

For \$500, migrants can upgrade to a package that includes porters and boats to

shorten the arduous walk. Desperation to make the harrowing journey in the hope of a better life in the United States has become a cash cow for Acandi locals.

With a record 380,000 people crossing the Darien Gap in the first nine months of this year, observers say predatory business is booming and ultimately filling the pockets of Colombia's feared Gulf Clan cartel which dominates the region.

Already exhausted, traumatized and malnourished by the time they reach Acandi, the migrants - many carrying babies and small children - must shell out ever more cash as they get deeper into the jungle. "Our plan is to keep moving, because you come with a dream. I swear we have given everything... we are penniless," said Ecuadorian Angelo Torres, 25, whose wife is four months pregnant. They are traveling with two children.

Some migrants spend weeks in Acandi gathering enough money to move on to the next camp on the route. "This problem, as many call it, has become an opportunity for us to work. In Acandi, the main business is migrants," said resident Darwin Garcia, who works with the organization managing the sophisticated operation that also provides restaurants and shelter. Every day, some 2,500 people fleeing violence and poverty across Latin America, and from some African and Asian nations, pass through the town to start the 266-kilometer (165-mile) journey through the Darien Gap.

The organization says the fee it charges makes it possible to provide the space for migrants to pitch tents, access bathrooms and buy food, all while providing jobs to some 2,000 locals. Colombia's defense ministry says the Gulf Clan is firmly behind the migrant business in the remote region from where it has long run one of the world's biggest cocaine trafficking operations. Garcia, 46, insists neither he nor the organization have anything to do with the cartel, and complains about being "stigmatized." — AFP



ACANDI: Migrants, mostly from Venezuela, remain in a shelter in Acandi, Colombia before continuing their journey towards the United States on September 19, 2023. — AFP

100 killed as fire engulfs crowded...

Continued from Page 1

The casualty toll was confirmed to AFP by health ministry spokesman Saif Al-Badr, who said most of the injured were being treated for burns, oxygen deprivation and crush injuries. But the director of health services in Nineveh, Mansour Marouf, on Wednesday afternoon said 94 people had died, with their bodies transported to different hospitals. Only 30 of those had been immediately identified by their families, he told a news conference. The Iraqi Red Crescent meanwhile reported more than 450 casualties, without providing a breakdown of deaths and injuries.

'We were suffocating'

Wedding guest Rania Waad, 17, who suffered burns to her hand, said that as the bride and groom "were slow dancing, the fireworks (flames) started to climb to the ceiling (and) the whole hall went up in flames". "We couldn't see anything," she said, choking back sobs. "We were suffocating. We didn't know how to get out." At the city's main hospital, an AFP photographer saw ambulances with sirens blaring and dozens of people gathering to donate blood, while bodies in black bags were being loaded onto a refrigerated truck.

On Wednesday, police and firefighters sifted through the charred remains of the reception hall where mangled metal chairs lay strewn amid the debris. Civil defense authorities said the hall had been fitted with prefabricated panels that were "highly flammable and contravened safety standards". The danger was compounded by the "release of toxic gases linked to the combustion of the panels", which contained plas-

tic, they said in a statement. "Preliminary information" suggested indoor fireworks had ignited the blaze, they said. Nine of the venue's staff were arrested and arrest warrants issued for its four owners, interior ministry spokesman General Saad Maan said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani declared three days of national mourning. He also ordered "intensified periodic inspections" of entertainment venues nationwide to "ensure that safety measures are followed" and to "identify any non-compliant buildings". Safety standards in Iraq's construction sector are often disregarded, and the country, whose infrastructure is in disrepair after decades of conflict, is often the scene of fatal fires and accidents.

In July 2021, a fire in hospital Covid unit killed more than 60 people in southern Iraq. And in April of the same year, oxygen tanks exploded and triggered a fire at a Baghdad hospital also treating COVID patients, killing more than 80 people. Qaraqosh, like many Christian cities in the Nineveh Plains northeast of Mosul, was ransacked by jihadists of the Islamic State group after they entered the city in 2014. The city and its churches were slowly rebuilt after the group's ouster in 2017, and Pope Francis visited it in March 2021.

Amir consoles Iraq

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday sent cables to Iraqi President Abdulatif Rashid and Prime Minister Mohammad Shayaa Al-Sudani expressing wholehearted condolences on the people who lost their lives in a fire at a hall during a wedding in Ninawa in North Iraq. His Highness the Amir prayed for souls of the deceased, for the bereaved families so they may patiently bear loss of their loved ones, wished the injured quick recovery and safety for the whole people of Iraq. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Iraqi leaders. — Agencies

tacks while peace talks are ongoing. Saudi Arabia, the United States, France and the United Nations condemned the attack, but only Washington and Manama blamed the Houthi rebels, who have made no comment on the subject. The attack was reported only hours after a statement by the Houthis decried "Saudi bombings" which they say left four wounded in their stronghold of Saada, near the Saudi border. Bahrain has taken part in the military intervention spearheaded by Saudi Arabia since 2015 in support of the Yemeni government against the Iran-backed rebels. — AFP

Third Bahraini soldier dies

MANAMA: Bahrain said Wednesday that a third member of its contingent in the Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen's Houthi rebels had died after an attack on Saudi Arabia earlier this week. Bahrain had announced the deaths of two of its soldiers posted near the Saudi border with Yemen on Monday, and accused the Houthi rebels of carrying out drone at-

Indonesia bans social media...

Continued from Page 1

The ministerial-level regulation - an amendment to a trade regulation issued in 2020 - did not need approval by lawmakers. Chinese technology giant and TikTok owner ByteDance and TikTok Indonesia did not respond immediately to a request for comment Wednesday. But a TikTok Indonesia spokesperson told AFP on Monday the ban would harm as many as six million local sellers who market their products on the platform. Meta - which owns Facebook and Instagram - did not respond to a request for comment.

Hasan appeared to confirm the companies would have to choose between separate social media and e-commerce licences. "It's clear... there are no permits for social commerce. If (they) want social commerce, please, only for promotion and ads. If (they) want to sell, there are e-commerce (permits)." The regulation also sets a minimum price of \$100 for certain foreign goods bought from Indonesian sellers on e-commerce platforms, according to the reg-

North Korea releases US soldier...

Continued from Page 1

The US soldiers' release followed a complex, "months-long" diplomatic effort, a senior US administration official said on condition of anonymity. King was "transferred out of the DPRK across the border to China, with the help of the government of Sweden. The United States has been able to receive him in China and is now in the process of transferring him home," the official said.

King's motives remained unclear for going to a country that has a long history of detaining Americans and using them as bargaining chips in bilateral negotiations. His border crossing came with relations between the two Koreas at one of their lowest points ever, with diplomacy stalled and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calling for increased weapons development, including tactical nuclear warheads. Seoul and Washington have ramped up defense cooperation in response, staging joint military exercises with ad-

ulation document seen by AFP. Some offline sellers at the Tanah Abang market in Jakarta applauded the government's decision. "The government should... dare to innovate given the current situation, where markets are quiet like this," said Stevanie Ahua, a 60-year-old wholesale denim jeans seller.

She said her revenue had dropped by 60 percent in recent months as buyers turned to online shops. Others such as 29-year-old cookie baker Panji Made Agung in Bali said he was disappointed by the ban. "For sellers like me, TikTok can be used for soft selling. We can become influencers and sellers at the same time," he said. Experts said the transaction ban would hit the coffers of social media platforms such as TikTok, which takes a commission from every sale.

"They will definitely incur losses," said Tauhid Ahmad, executive director of the Jakarta-based Institute for Development of Economics and Finance. Indonesia's e-commerce market is dominated by platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee and Lazada but TikTok Shop gained a significant market share since launching in 2021. Indonesia, with 125 million users, is TikTok's second-largest global market after the United States, according to company figures. TikTok's chief executive Shou Zi Chew visited Jakarta in June, pledging to pour billions of dollars into Southeast Asia in the years ahead. — AFP

vanced stealth jets and US strategic assets. The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a treaty, and most of the border between them is heavily fortified. But at the Joint Security Area where King made his escape, the frontier is marked only by a low concrete divider and is relatively easy to cross, despite the presence of soldiers on both sides. One of the last US citizens to be detained by the North was student Otto Warmbier, who was held for a year and a half before being released in a coma to the United States. He died six days later.

Around half a dozen American soldiers made rare defections to the North after the Korean War and were used for the country's propaganda. In one such case, US soldier Charles Robert Jenkins crossed into the North in 1965, drunk after 10 beers, while patrolling the DMZ in an attempt to avoid facing combat duty in Vietnam. Although he quickly regretted his defection, Jenkins was held for decades, teaching English to North Korean soldiers and appearing in propaganda leaflets and films. He was eventually allowed to leave in 2004 and subsequently spoke out about the dire conditions of life in the North until he died in 2017. — AFP

International

Zionist entity passport holders can now enter US visa-free

Washington claims Zionist entity reduced discrimination against Arab Americans

WASHINGTON: The United States said Wednesday it will start letting citizens of the Zionist entity visit without visas after concluding its ally reduced discrimination against Arab Americans, an assessment rejected by some lawmakers and activists.

In a decision that places the Zionist entity in the same league as most Western nations, President Joe Biden's administration said that the entity's citizens by the end of November will no longer need visas for short trips to the world's largest economy.

The decision came after the Zionist entity in July promised a series of steps to comply with longstanding US demands to treat all US passport holders equally without discriminating against Americans who are of Palestinian or other Arab heritage or who are Muslim.

Visa-free travel marks "a critical step forward in our strategic partnership" with the Zionist entity, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement, adding that it will "further strengthen long-standing people-to-people engagement, economic cooperation and security coordination."

He said the end result will be greater "freedom of movement for US citizens, including those living in the Palestinian Territories or traveling to and from them." A US official briefing reporters insisted that the decision was not a "favor" to the Zionist entity but the result of progress.

Ahmed Majdalani, the Palestinian social affairs minister, said the US decision "appears to be a reward" for letting Palestinian Americans enter the Zionist entity. It also confirms that America stands by the Zionist entity "all the time," he said.

A number of lawmakers from Biden's own Democratic Party had urged Blinken not to go ahead before a Saturday deadline, saying the United States should have maintained pressure until the Zionist entity ends a two-tiered system that treats US citizens with Palestinian connections differently.

"It is clear that [the Zionist entity] is not in compliance with this law as it relates to reciprocal treatment for all US citizens," said a letter signed by 15 senators led by Chris Van Hollen and Brian Schatz and including Bernie Sanders.

Enough progress?

Already, Americans generally don't require a visa to enter the Zionist entity. But until the July agree-



JERUSALEM: A US flag flies at the US embassy complex in Jerusalem on Sept 27, 2023. — AFP

ment, Palestinian Americans seeking to enter the West Bank were obliged to cross by the Allenby Bridge with Jordan and were not allowed through Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv.

The Democratic senators said that more change was necessary as US citizens who hold Palestinian identification cards still cannot rent cars at Ben Gurion and some have been stopped at checkpoints set up by the Zionist entity's police that prohibit Palestinians from going through.

An Arab American group announced Tuesday that it was filing a lawsuit to stop Zionist entity's admission into the visa waiver program, saying there were still effectively "separate classes" of US citizens.

"Admitting [Zionist entity] into the visa waiver program would be an endorsement of discrimination against Palestinian and Arab Americans," said Abed Ayoub, national executive director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

But another US official said that the Zionist

entity met demands by keeping refusal of Americans seeking to enter as non-immigrants at 2.27 percent in the last fiscal year, within the target of a maximum three percent.

The American Jewish Committee hailed the decision, which it said would "allow for even stronger ties" between the United States and the Zionist entity. US officials said they would review the Zionist entity's progress and could rescind the visa waiver status if there is backsliding.

Historically the United States, in letting foreigners enter without visas, has been most concerned that they not stay illegally and that their countries issue secure passports. Nearly all Western nationals enjoy visa-free entry into the United States including people from all European Union members except Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania. Other beneficiaries include people from high-income Asian societies -- Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Brunei. — AFP

itchiness and discharge from the eyes and contamination can spread through hand contact, as well as coughing and sneezing. "The closure has been announced as a proactive measure to give maximum protection to students against the infection," Punjab education department spokesman Zulfikar Ali told AFP. There are 127,000,000 residents in eastern Punjab province and 56,000 state schools, as well as thousands of independent schools also subject to the shutdown. "We hope this will break the cycle of the infection in the province," Ali said.

Schools across Pakistan had already been due to shut on Friday owing to a public religious holiday, however many would usually open over the weekend to provide extra classes or stage exams. Punjab authorities said students would be screened at school gates when they reopen Monday. — AFP

Chinese universities climb up leading global ranking

LONDON: Chinese universities are making a "dramatic" rise up a leading university rankings table as higher education institutions in Britain and the United States face growing competition from Asia. According to the annual Times Higher Education World University Rankings published Wednesday, two Chinese universities entered the top 15 for the first time in the 20-year history of the ranking.

China's Tsinghua University occupied 12th place on the list, gaining four places since last year, while Peking University rose from 17th to 14th. Overall, China had seven universities in the top 100, compared to two universities in 2018, while the number of Chinese institutions in the top 400 list doubled from 15 in 2021 to 30 this year.

"The competition from East Asia is accelerating," said Phil Baty, chief global affairs officer at Times Higher Education, which publishes the ranking. Baty added that China in particular is "making further dramatic rises up the rankings", adding that other East Asian countries, such as South Korea and Singapore, are "also remaining strong".

The top of the ranking remains dominated by the United States with 13 universities making the top 20, with Stanford University in second place and The Massachusetts Institute of Technology in third. Britain's University of Oxford was ranked the world's number one for an eighth year in a row with two other UK universities also making the top 20, including Cambridge -- fifth behind Harvard in the US.

But despite leading the rankings both Britain and the United States saw a decrease in the number of universities in the top 200 -- by four and three institutions respectively -- since 2021. This year's ranking -- "our biggest and most rigorous" according to Baty -- includes 1,904 universities from 108 countries and regions. The assessment criteria cover performance indicators grouped into five areas: teaching, research quality, research environment, international outlook and industry.

Rankings by Times Higher Education are among the leading university rankings, alongside those produced by UK-based Quacquarelli Symonds, the Academic Ranking of World Universities in Shanghai and the US News Best Global Universities Ranking. — AFP

Rising crime in Washington divides politicians

WASHINGTON: Violent crime is on the rise in the US capital, where a 28-percent uptick in homicides this year has left researchers perplexed and politicians pointing fingers. And while Washington is still a far cry from its days as the "murder capital" of the United States, amid the 1990s crack epidemic, the rise in violent crime in the city is both causing consternation among residents and dividing them.

Some of the killings have been especially grim: a 10-year-old girl who died from a stray bullet on Mother's Day; an Afghan immigrant who, having fled his country after the Taliban took over, was shot to death while working a late shift as a Lyft driver.

Puzzling researchers is the fact that Washington's murder rate has jumped while other major metros in the United States have seen declines. Also, the number of armed carjackings in the city has more than doubled, according to police statistics.

'Outlier' among US cities

"DC is something of an outlier with respect to homicide trends," when compared to cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago or Baltimore, says Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St Louis. Rosenfeld added that the explanation behind the uptick "remains something of a mystery." Meanwhile, Joseph Richardson, a professor at the University of Maryland who studies violence prevention programs in Washington, has several theories. "We can speculate that there may be a few things that are happening," he tells AFP, including a recent change in police leadership. He also suspects the number of shootings linked to drug trafficking is underestimated.

Another theory is the destabilizing effect of gentrification. As certain neighborhoods improve, poor renters can be priced out. In the United States, where poverty often falls along racial lines, it's frequently Black Americans who are uprooted.

But some arguments put forward by authorities and politicians -- such as a lack of police officers, or the fact that two-thirds of arrests aren't followed up with prosecutions -- don't convince Rosenfeld, the criminologist. And Washington is hardly the only city in the United States awash with guns. Rather, "it appears that Washington has recovered more slowly from the dislocations of the pandemic than many other cities," he says, leaving certain areas that were once "congested with pedestrians... relatively empty as a result."



WASHINGTON, DC: The US Capitol in Washington, DC, on Sept 26, 2023. — AFP

'A haven for crime'

The city is a far cry from where it was in the 1980s and 90s, when entire swaths of Washington were considered dangerous. Both international and domestic tourists still flock to the city's flower-filled streets, and many residents can claim a high quality of life and easy access to amenities.

Yet things have changed enough to alter some Washingtonians' habits, like those who now avoid going to gas stations at night, worried about carjackings. The consular section of the Embassy of Mexico issued a statement on social media warning that the city "is experiencing a significant increase in crime in areas previously considered safe." One restaurant in Washington posted on X, formerly Twitter, calling for help as the corner it sits on becomes "a haven for crime and harassment."

They 'let it happen'

Debates on why crime has risen and what to do about it have become hot-button political issues in a country whose instances of police brutality have at times shocked the world. Pamela Smith, named the local police chief this summer, has called for an "all-government approach" at a moment where "there seems to be an uptick in our juveniles committing some of these crimes."

City council member Trayon White, meanwhile, caused a storm when he called for the deployment of the National Guard. In March, Republicans in Congress summoned city officials for a hearing, accusing the Democratic-majority city of being "soft on crime." But Jada, a 28-year-old Black security guard who works downtown and preferred not to give her last name, wondered if politicians and authorities actually care about crime in the city. "Homicide rates, I feel like it's mostly Black-on-Black crime," she told AFP. "Because it's Black-on-Black or it is Hispanic-on-Hispanic, I don't feel like they care. I feel like they're just going to let it happen." Whether they care or not, the killings aren't stopping: on Monday, in the southwest of the city, where Jada lives, yet another teenager was killed in a shooting. — AFP



LAHORE: A doctor examines a patient suffering from an eye infection at a hospital in Lahore on Sept 27, 2023. — AFP

56,000 Pakistan schools shut over eye virus outbreak

LAHORE: More than 56,000 Pakistan schools will shut for the rest of the week in a bid to curb a mass outbreak of a contagious eye virus, officials said Wednesday. Millions of students will stay home from tomorrow after Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, announced blanket closures having recorded 357,000 conjunctivitis cases since the start of the year.

The fast-spreading eye infection causes redness,

sphere as "apocalyptic". "On Monday, it was like the sun never rose," she told AFP from Greenland's capital Nuuk, adding that she had been able to smell the smoke.

Images on social media showed a dark sky in parts of Greenland, covered in thick haze. Ash particles from the Canadian fires were also detected in Norway in June, having travelled all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.

Bouchard said it was the first time smoke has spread like this in Greenland since the Canadian fires began. "In summer, we experienced some beautiful red sunsets due to some ash particles in the air, but there was neither a smell nor a dark cloud," she said. Police said on Facebook that they believe winds brought smoke from the Canadian fires to the west coast of Greenland. — AFP

Canadian wildfire smoke darkens Greenland skies

COPENHAGEN: Smoke from Canadian wildfires has darkened skies in Greenland's west, said residents of the Arctic island who are hundreds of kilometers from Canada's coast. Canada has experienced its worst ever wildfire season this year, with every one of its 13 provinces and territories affected, and thousands of people evacuated.

Researcher Caroline Bouchard, who lives on the west coast of Greenland, described the atmo-



WEST KELOWNA: A helicopter drops water as the McDougall Creek wildfire continues to burn in West Kelowna, British Columbia, on Aug 19, 2023. -- AFP

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2023

Morocco aims to become key player in green hydrogen

Around 1.5m acres of land set aside for green hydrogen plants

RABAT: Morocco has voiced ambitious plans to become North Africa's top player in the emerging "green hydrogen" sector, with plans to export the clean-burning fuel to Europe. Hydrogen is seen as a clean energy source that can help the world phase out fossil fuels and reduce atmospheric carbon emissions in the battle to slow global warming.

Morocco, which already runs large solar power plants, also hopes to harness green hydrogen — the kind made without burning fossil fuels — for its sizeable fertilizer sector. Around 1.5 million acres (6,000 square kilometers) of public land — nearly the size of Kuwait — have been set aside for green hydrogen and ammonia plants, the economy ministry says.

King Mohammed VI has hailed a national green hydrogen plan dubbed l'Offre Maroc (the Moroccan Offer) and called for its "rapid and qualitative implementation". Speaking in July, before the country's earthquake disaster, he said Morocco must take advantage of "the projects supported by international investors in this promising sector". Local media have reported about investment plans by Australian, British, French, German and Indian companies.

Fertilizer sales

Hydrogen can be extracted from water by passing a strong electrical current through it. This separates the hydrogen from the oxygen, a process called electrolysis. If the power used is clean — such as solar or wind — the fuel is called "green hydrogen", which is itself emission-free when burnt. But there are problems: hydrogen is highly explosive and hard to store and transport. This has set back hydrogen fuel cell cars in the race against electric vehicles using lithium-ion batteries.

However, experts say green hydrogen also has a big role to play in decarbonizing energy-intensive industries that cannot easily be electrified such as steel, cement and chemicals. Powering blast furnaces with hydrogen, for example, offers the promise of making "green steel". Hydrogen can also be

converted into ammonia, to store the energy or as a major input in synthetic fertilizers. Morocco is already a major player in the global fertilizer market, thanks mainly to its immense phosphate reserves. It profited after fertilizer shortages sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent prices up to 1,000 euros (\$1,060) per ton. Morocco's state Phosphate Office has announced plans to quickly produce a million tons of "green ammonia" from green hydrogen and triple the amount by 2032.

Solar power

Analysts caution that Morocco still has some way to go with its ambitious green fertilizer plans. The sector is "embryonic and the large global projects will not see the light of day until three to five years from now", said Samir Rachidi, director of the Moroccan research institute IRESEN. Morocco's advantage is that it has already bet heavily on clean energy over the past 15 years. Solar, wind and other clean energy make up 38 percent of production, and the goal is to reach 52 percent by 2030.

For now green hydrogen is more expensive than the highly polluting "brown hydrogen" made using coal or "grey hydrogen" produced from natural gas. The goal is to keep green hydrogen production below \$1-\$2 per kilogram, Ahmed Reda Chami, president of the Economic, Social and Environmental Counsel, told the weekly La Vie Eco. Rachidi of IRESEN said water-scarce Morocco must also step up the desalination of seawater for the process. It must build "an industrial value chain which begins with seawater desalination plants for electrolysis, electricity storage, to transportation and hydrogen marketing", he said. Already hit by droughts that threaten its farm sector, Morocco has announced plans to add seven desalination plants to its 12 existing facilities.

Regional contest

Morocco is competing on green hydrogen with



OUARZAZATE, Morocco: A picture taken on February 4, 2016 shows an aerial view of the solar mirrors at the Noor 1 Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) plant, some 20km (12.5 miles) outside the central Moroccan town of Ouarzazate, ahead of its inauguration. — AFP

other regional countries from Egypt to Mauritania. Business consultants Deloitte have predicted that North Africa will be the world's largest green hydrogen-exporting region by 2050, reshuffling the global energy cards. Algeria, a major fossil fuel exporter, can capitalize on "one of the most important potentials in the world" in terms of solar and wind energy and gas pipeline infrastructure, said Rabah Sellami, director of its Renewable Energies Commission. Currently, Algeria produces only three percent of its electricity through renewables, but is investing heavily to boost capacity. Algeria has numerous desalination plants whose capacity is

set to more than double to two billion cubic meters (about 70 billion cubic feet) in 2030.

Its roadmap for green hydrogen targets "production of one million tons for export to the European market" and 250,000 tons for domestic consumption, said Sellami. Tunisia also wants to enter the fray, provided it can build up its renewables production, said its energy ministry's general director Belhasen Chiboub. It hopes to grow clean power output from three percent now to 35 percent by 2030. If it meets that target, Chiboub predicted, "it will be able to export between 5.5 and six million tons of green hydrogen to Europe by 2050". — AFP

UK approves North Sea oil production

LONDON: Britain on Wednesday authorized oil and gas production in its largest undeveloped field to bolster its energy security, one week after the government diluted its net zero targets, triggering further condemnation by environmentalists.

Norwegian oil and gas producer Equinor and Ithaca Energy, a subsidiary of Israeli group Delek, will together invest \$3.8 billion in developing the Rosebank field in the North Sea off the coast of Scotland.

The North Sea Transition Authority, a UK oil and gas regulator, said it had "granted development and production consent for the Rosebank field, north-west of Shetland". Equinor has an 80 percent interest in the project and Ithaca the remainder. "Rosebank stands as the largest undeveloped field in the UK," said Gilad Myerson, executive chairman at Ithaca Energy.

"The Rosebank project will create thousands of jobs and contribute significantly to securing the UK's energy



LONDON: Britain on Wednesday authorized oil and gas production in its largest undeveloped field to boost energy security.

needs for many years to come," he added. The UK government maintains it must beef up energy security via continued production of fossil fuels following the invasion of Ukraine by key producer Russia, even if it means pushing back its target on net zero carbon emissions.

"We are investing in our world-leading renewable energy but... we will need oil and gas as part of that mix on the path to net zero, and so it makes sense to use our own supplies from North Sea fields such

as Rosebank," said Energy Security Secretary Claire Coutinho. "We will continue to back the UK's oil and gas industry to underpin our energy security, grow our economy and help us deliver the transition to cheaper, cleaner energy," she added. But Scotland's First Minister Humza Yousaf alleged that most of the oil and gas extracted from Rosebank would go overseas, and hit out at London's focus on fossil-fuel production.

"We recognize the significant contribution the oil and gas sector makes

to Scotland. However, our future is not in unlimited oil and gas extraction. It is in accelerating our just transition to renewables," Yousaf said in a statement. Wednesday's announcement comes a week after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak softened policies aimed at the UK achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Specifically, he said a ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars would be pushed back from 2030 to 2035. Sunak also announced an easing of energy efficiency targets for rental properties and backtracked on plans to make homeowners replace gas boilers with heat pumps.

The UK oil and gas regulator said Wednesday that the decision to authorize new North Sea output had taken "net zero considerations into account throughout the project's lifecycle".

But the announcement prompted fierce criticism from environmentalists. "This is morally obscene," Green Party lawmaker Caroline Lucas posted on X, formally known as Twitter. "It won't improve energy security or lower bills—but it will shatter our climate commitments." Philip Evans, Greenpeace UK's climate campaigner, said "Sunak has proven once and for all that he puts the profits of oil companies above everyday people". — AFP



WUHAN: Evergrande's president Xu Jiayin, also known as Hui Ka Yan in Cantonese, attending a meeting in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

Police hold boss of troubled Evergrande

BEIJING: The billionaire boss of beleaguered Chinese property developer China Evergrande is being held by police, a report said Wednesday, as the debt-ridden company grapples with severe financial difficulties. Xu Jiayin, who is known as Hui Ka Yan in Cantonese, was taken away by authorities earlier this month, according to anonymous sources cited by Bloomberg News.

He is being held under "residential surveillance", the report said, which does not mean he has been arrested or charged with a crime. Calls by AFP to Evergrande offices in Hong Kong and mainland China went unanswered and the company did not respond to a request for comment.

Evergrande's enormous debt has contributed to the country's deepening property sector crisis, raising fears of a global spillover. The company's property arm this week missed a key debt payment due, and Chinese financial website Caixin reported that former executives at the firm had been detained.

The 65-year-old chairman was once China's richest man, with a taste for luxury labels and yachts, and a nose for praising the Communist Party that steered the economy to a home-ownership boom.

Xu's wealth is now estimated at \$1.8 billion — down from \$42 billion in 2017 — according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. On Sunday evening, Evergrande announced that it was unable to issue new debt as its subsidiary, Hengda Real Estate Group, was being investigated.

That came two days after the company said meetings this week on a key restructuring plan would not take place, adding it was "necessary to reassess the terms" of the plan in order to suit the "objective situation and the demand of the creditors". China's property sector, which along with construction accounts for about a quarter of the country's gross domestic product, is a key pillar of the country's growth and has experienced a dazzling boom in recent decades. — AFP

TotalEnergies to raise fossil fuel production

PARIS: French oil and gas major TotalEnergies said Wednesday that it would boost fossil fuel production over the next five years, a reversal after years of reducing output. The group's oil and gas production had been dropping every year between 2019 and 2022.

The company had also never given a forecast for how much production would fall or increase, saying instead that it would remain stable by the end of the decade. But in a statement before presenting its strategy to investors in New York on Wednesday, TotalEnergies announced it would increase output by two to three percent per year, mainly from liquefied natural gas.

"TotalEnergies reaffirms the relevance of its balanced multi-energy strategy considering the developments in the oil, gas and electricity markets," the firm said. It added that it was "in a very favorable position to take advantage of changing energy prices".

The oil and gas business "is expected to generate more than \$3 billion of additional underlying cash



TotalEnergies expects to raise fossil fuel production by two to three percent over the next five years — AFP

flow in 2028 compared to 2023 at constant prices", TotalEnergies said. Oil prices have increased in recent months on concerns about supply following cuts by major producers Saudi Arabia and Russia.

TotalEnergies said it was refocusing its oil and gas portfolio on assets and projects with "low greenhouse gas emissions" while also diversifying into renewable energy. The company said it was "implementing its transition strategy while offering an

attractive shareholder return".

TotalEnergies also said it was "drastically lowering the emissions from its operations".

Fossil fuel use is set to be the main bone of contention at key UN talks aimed at curbing climate change, starting on November 30 in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates. Energy firms have come under fire from climate activists for not doing enough to turn away from oil and gas. — AFP

Indonesia bans goods sales on social media platforms

Jakarta reins in social media transactions to help small businesses

JAKARTA: Indonesia has banned goods transactions on social media platforms in a new regulation, its trade minister said Wednesday, as Jakarta aims to rein in direct sales on major platforms it says are harming millions of small businesses.

Calls had grown in recent months for a regulation governing social media and e-commerce, with offline sellers seeing their livelihoods threatened by the sale of cheaper products on TikTok Shop and other platforms. "This trade regulation has been in force (since yesterday)," Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan told a news conference in the capital Jakarta.

He said social commerce platforms would have a week to comply with the new rule.

"Any government would protect local small businesses," he said, saying the regulation was passed to ensure "equality in business competition". The regulation means social media firms will not be able to conduct direct transactions but only promote products on their platforms.

"Social commerce can place ads like TV, but it mustn't be transactional. (They) can't open shop, can't directly sell," he said, without mentioning TikTok by name.

Laws in the archipelago nation did not cover direct transactions through social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook or Instagram before the new regulation. The new regulation is yet another setback for TikTok, which has faced intense scrutiny in the United States and other nations in recent months over users' data security and the company's alleged ties to Beijing.

"Other countries are banning, we don't, (we're) regulating," Hasan said. Indonesia is one of the world's biggest markets for TikTok Shop and was the first to pilot the app's e-commerce arm. But Indonesia is now the first country in the region to act against the platform's growing popularity in social media commerce.

The ministerial-level regulation—an amendment to a trade regulation issued in 2020 -- did not need approval by lawmakers. Chinese technology giant and TikTok owner ByteDance and TikTok Indonesia did not respond immediately to a request for comment Wednesday.

But a TikTok Indonesia spokesperson told AFP on Monday the ban would harm as many as six million local sellers who market their products on the platform. Meta—which owns Facebook and Instagram—did not respond to a request for comment.



JAKARTA: Monica Amadea (center), owner of a TikTok sales channel called Monomolly, and her employees offering merchandise through a TikTok livestream in Jakarta.-- AFP

'Markets are quiet'

How the ban will work exactly remains unclear but experts said it could mean social media firms would have to obtain a separate approval for their e-commerce arms. "It could be that their license will be rearranged," said Tauhid Ahmad, executive director of the Jakarta-based Institute for Development of Economics and Finance. Offline sellers at Tanah Abang market in Jakarta applauded the government's decision. "The government should... dare to innovate given the current situation, where markets are quiet like this," said Stevanie Ahua, a 60-year-old wholesale denim jeans seller.

She said her revenue had dropped by 60 percent

in recent months as buyers turned to online shops. Others like 29-year-old cookie baker Panji Made Agung in Bali said he was disappointed by the ban.

"For sellers like me, TikTok can be used for soft selling. We can become influencers and sellers at the same time," he said.

Indonesia's e-commerce market is dominated by platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee and Lazada but TikTok Shop gained a significant market share since launching in 2021. Indonesia, with 125 million users, is TikTok's second-largest global market after the United States, according to company figures.

TikTok's chief executive Shou Zi Chew visited Jakarta in June, pledging to pour billions of dollars into Southeast Asia in the coming years. -- AFP

Sri Lanka's recovery not yet assured: IMF

COLOMBO: Bankrupt Sri Lanka's economic recovery was "not yet assured", the International Monetary Fund warned Wednesday, after the first review of its \$2.9 billion bailout aimed at repairing the island nation's ruined finances. The Washington-based lender of last resort said Sri Lanka had been unable to meet its revenue targets and ensure growth although it had tamed runaway inflation. "Despite early signs of stabilization, full economic recovery is not yet assured," the IMF said.

Last year's economic crash sparked dire food, fuel and medicine shortages, as well as months of civil unrest that eventually toppled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has raised taxes and removed energy subsidies, but the IMF said state revenue was still below expectations. An IMF delegation wrapped up their two-week mission to Sri Lanka without an announcement on releasing the second tranche of \$330 million.

Colombo had expected that funding to be signed over at the end of the latest talks. But the IMF said it was still reviewing "financing assurances" from external creditors on restructuring Sri Lanka's bilateral and private debt. Colombo is in discussion with its private creditors to restructure Sri Lanka's international sovereign bonds, after defaulting on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022.

Talks are underway with bilateral lenders and part of the domestic debt has already been restructured.

China, which accounts for 52 percent of the island's bilateral debt, has not made its position on restructuring public, but has agreed to support Colombo. -- AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	915	906	916	902	14	14,546,437	-8	-0.90%	-11.80%	902	916	13.7	1.74	3.7%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	259	263	263	252	11	33,594,992	4	1.50%	-12.10%	261	266	13.1	1.22	3.6%	1.29
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	152	152	153	148	5	29,330,009	-1	-0.70%	-15.20%	151	160	15.8	0.57	2.4%	1.13
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	185	182	185	179	6	2,721,149	-3	-1.60%	-12.70%	179	185	18.5	0.70	4.1%	1.31
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	738	733	739	723	16	41,823,042	-5	-0.70%	-2.00%	725	744	19.1	1.87	2.3%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	605	604	608	589	19	12,491,141	-1	-0.20%	-19.80%	593	618	40.0	2.48	0.9%	1.22
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	130	129	131	127	4	2,660,318	-4	-3.00%	-15.10%	129	133	9.1	0.59	3.8%	1.82
204	National Investments	Financial Services	233	228	233	226	7	3,772,678	-4	-1.70%	-3.80%	227	232	178.1	1.03	12.1%	1.99
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	123	117	125	117	8	25,718,584	-5	-4.10%	4.50%	116	122	29.3	0.68	0.0%	0.99
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	164	181	195	164	31	76,705,282	19	11.70%	60.50%	172	186	34.3	1.36	2.1%	1.12
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	165	160	165	159	6	26,702,238	-5	-3.00%	20.30%	158	163	9.4	1.15	4.7%	1.68
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	66	65	66	64	2	1,116,320	-1	-0.80%	-13.90%	63.4	65.5	-	0.41	13.9%	1.29
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	162	165	167	161	6	48,180,967	4	2.50%	57.40%	158	166	15.2	1.17	1.8%	1.07
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	836	825	836	807	29	3,584,647	-11	-1.30%	3.10%	811	825	17.2	1.84	1.6%	1.08
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	100	99	103	98	5	11,420,545	-2	-2.10%	3.00%	97	99	18.0	0.61	2.9%	0.61
501	National Industries	Financial Services	207	200	207	198	9	18,150,233	-9	-4.30%	-3.20%	194	200	141.8	0.95	2.4%	1.61
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,230	1,174	1,230	1,144	86	3,066,083	-38	-3.10%	-3.40%	1,171	1,202	13.1	1.09	5.1%	1.06
506	HEISCO	Industrials	740	736	746	720	26	615,152	-5	-0.70%	20.10%	720	753	21.8	1.91	2.7%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	695	693	700	670	30	3,037,158	-5	-0.70%	-13.40%	687	708	10.4	1.33	8.6%	0.93
603	Agility	Industrials	550	558	558	509	49	25,301,917	8	1.50%	-22.50%	533	566	20.7	0.75	0.0%	1.55
605	Zain	Telecommunications	496	487	498	485	13	11,021,282	-9	-1.80%	-13.50%	485	503	10.0	1.70	7.2%	0.65
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,215	3,125	3,234	3,120	114	535,582	-60	-1.90%	-6.80%	3,100	3,200	9.2	3.80	12.0%	0.66
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	170	170	172	168	4	769,923	2	1.20%	-16.30%	167	171	-	0.74	0.0%	1.15
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,550	1,474	1,550	1,455	95	804,320	-28	-1.90%	-22.40%	1,455	1,571	17.1	10.24	5.3%	1.50
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	80	79	80	78	2	18,832,351	-1	-1.50%	4.50%	79.0	81.1	8.7	0.93	6.1%	1.37
821	Warba Bank	Banking	188	185	188	182	6	27,491,323	-2	-1.10%	-18.90%	182	188	26.1	1.01	1.6%	1.14
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	523	508	525	500	25	2,325,411	-14	-2.70%	29.30%	490	519	74.9	1.50	2.4%	0.47
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	426	432	432	424	8	3,913,806	5	1.20%	16.80%	425	435	34.9	1.80	3.5%	0.69
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	192	186	192	185	7	1,983,469	-6	-3.10%	-1.10%	186	189	15.0	1.68	6.5%	0.43
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,929	1,845	1,930	1,800	130	543,678	-68	-3.60%	-10.10%	1,840	1,872	23.6	6.52	4.6%	0.89
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,167	1,160	1,170	1,141	29	2,102,354	8	0.70%	44.10%	1,140	1,175	13.2	4.10	6.0%	0.20

* As of end of week closing

Innovation faces uncertainty: UN

Switzerland again tops the list of world's most innovative countries

GENEVA: Funding of innovation is becoming increasingly uncertain, with high interest rates taking a toll on the amounts venture capitalists are willing and able to dish out, the UN said Wednesday. In a fresh report, the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) found that 2022 was marked by swelling government and company spending on research and development, especially in areas like artificial intelligence and biotech.

But at the same time, the global value of the venture capital (VC) funding that helps transform ideas and inspiration into products and services plunged 40 percent, and is continuing to fall.

"There has been a drop in the investment environment," WIPO chief Daren Tang told reporters in a virtual briefing. "Venture capital funding is becoming more and more scarce." The drop last year came after a dramatic surge in such funding in 2021, as the pandemic spurred spending in new areas and in regions that do not usually receive a large share of such investments.

But the funding levels have not just evened out. Sacha Wunsch-Vincent, co-author of the report, said the decline had continued, with a 47-percent drop seen in the first half of 2023 compared to 2022. "This is only the tip of the iceberg," he told reporters.

Pointing to "a harsher investment condi-

tions", including slow economic recoveries and geopolitical tensions, he warned the current high interest rates especially "endanger the future of innovation".

"Borrowing isn't free anymore. It's really the end of cheap money." At the same time, WIPO stressed that the picture for innovation was mixed, with 2022 also marked by a significant rise in R&D spending by corporations, to a record high of \$1.1 trillion. And preliminary data indicated that global government R&D budgets increased in real terms last year. Patents also continued to rise, and while the value of VC funding dropped, the number of VC deals actually swelled, the report showed. That boom was fuelled in part by activities in the field of artificial intelligence, Wunsch-Vincent said. Information communication technology companies "were already spending a lot of money, ... but are now almost in an arms race for more spending on AI", he said, also highlighting spending in pharma, biotech and construction. A number of sectors that cut spending during the pandemic had meanwhile seen spending bounce back, including automobiles.

'More diverse'

Wednesday's report also comprised the UN agency's annual ranking of the world's most innovative countries, with Switzerland topping the list for the 13th year running. But the Global Innovation Index

2023 showed that the innovation economy, long heavily concentrated in North America and Western Europe, is diversifying. Kuwait is in the 64th position in the innovation ranking. The UAE is in the 32nd position while Saudi Arabia remains in the 48th ranking. Qatar is 50th position and Bahrain is in 67th position.

"It is getting more diverse, there are more engines of innovation around the world," Tang said. The top 10 list still includes mainly Western countries, with the exception of Singapore in fifth position, and South Korea in tenth. The United States slipped to third position, with Sweden now in second, and Britain remaining in fourth.

China meanwhile dipped slightly from 11th to 12th place, but from 35th a decade ago. China figures among the middle-income countries that have climbed the ranking the fastest in the past decade, alongside the likes of Turkey, India and Iran.

Since the pandemic started four years ago, Mauritius, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Pakistan have meanwhile risen most, WIPO said. While the value of VC funding shrank last year, Wunsch-Vincent meanwhile said it was positive that the investments remained spread out geographically, and had not shrunk back to simply focus on the traditional centers of innovation. Africa was the only region that did not see a decline in the value of VC funding last year, he said. — AFP



Nigeria unions call strike over fuel subsidy fallout

ABUJA: Nigeria's major unions on Tuesday called for a national strike next week in protest at the government's response to tackling the rising cost of living.

Africa's largest economy has seen living and transport costs heavily impacted after the government ended a petrol subsidy and also freed the naira currency, leading to a sharp devaluation of the local money. Inflation is at 25 percent while fuel costs have tripled since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ended the subsidy when he came to power in May calling the move part of necessary reforms to improve a struggling economy.

The National Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) said they had to call an indefinite strike on October 3 because the government failed to address their concerns in talks over how to ease the financial burden for Nigerians.

"The government has totally abdicated this responsibility and has shown gross unwillingness to act abandoning Nigerian people and workers to excruciating poverty and affliction," they said in a joint statement. They called on all workers to stop activities from October 3 and said they would organize street protests. Tinubu's administration acknowledges the difficulties and says it distributed funds to state governments to help offset the impact of the economic reforms. Other measures include providing transport options and small business loans.

The NLC brings together unions for many industries from nurses to road workers and printers while the TUC represents senior bank workers and high school teachers among others. Nigerian unions have threatened or gone on strike in the past only to come back into negotiations. It was not clear how much traction next week's industrial action would gain. The NLC and TUC called a strike in August over the same issues, with many businesses, government offices, markets, banks closed for a day in the capital Abuja. Strike impact in the economic capital Lagos was more mixed.

Tinubu said ending the fuel subsidy was essential as it cost the government billions each year to keep the price of petrol artificially low. Nigeria, a member of the OPEC oil exporters' organization, is a major crude producer but lacks refining capacity and is forced to import most of its fuel requirements. — AFP

Alghanim, Hongqi unite to elevate Kuwait's luxury auto market

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, a key division of the Kutayba Alghanim Group and a leader in industrial innovation within Kuwait, is delighted to announce its strategic partnership with Hongqi, China's premier luxury automotive brand. This significant alliance was commemorated with an opulent launch ceremony at the Waldorf Astoria, an epitome of luxury and refinement in Kuwait City.

The event convened a distinguished roster of attendees, including senior government officials, leading business figures, renowned experts in the automotive field, and selected media representatives. Far exceeding the confines of a typical product launch, this occasion served as a milestone in the convergence of two storied legacies. Anchoring the evening was a mesmerizing light show that heightened the sensory experience, leaving a lasting impression on all privileged to attend.

In a statement made during the ceremony, Youssef Behbehani, Vice President of Automotive at Alghanim Industries, remarked, "This is not merely a partnership; it represents a confluence of visions. For over a century, Alghanim Industries has upheld a customer-first philosophy. Collaborating with Hongqi enables us to perpetuate this long-standing legacy of offering unparalleled products and services to our esteemed clientele."

For more than a century, Alghanim Industries has been a cornerstone of trust, quality, and customer service in Kuwait. Our new strategic partnership with Hongqi, a leading luxury automotive brand from China, reinforces Alghanim Industries' unwavering commitment to deliver products that not only meet but exceed our customers' expectations. This collaboration strengthens our position as an industry leader in the Kuwaiti market. The collaboration between Alghanim Industries and Hongqi serves as a notable milestone in the growing industrial relationship between Kuwait and China. As China continues to be



a frontrunner in automotive innovation, our partnership enables Alghanim Industries to introduce this cutting-edge technology and unparalleled luxury to Kuwaiti consumers. While the partnership's primary focus is on elevating the automotive experience, it also has a broader impact, enhancing trade relations and mutual growth between both nations, all while providing a compelling mix of cultural heritage, modern luxury, and future-focused engineering.

The synthesis of tradition and innovation

Hongqi, as China's oldest and most prestigious automobile brand, embodies a unique blend of timeless Chinese craftsmanship and advanced automotive technology. Established in 1958, the brand has garnered a reputation for engineering vehicles that are not just modes of transportation, but symbols of elegance, quality, and cultural significance. Its collaboration with Alghanim Industries aims to bring this esteemed legacy to the discerning clientele of Kuwait, offering a selection of automobiles that are as luxurious as they are innovative.

1. The Hongqi HS5: As the epitome of compact SUV sophistication, the HS5 seamlessly combines plush comfort with the pinnacle of safety innovation. With cutting-edge functionalities like adaptive cruise control and blind-spot detection, the HS5 is designed

to prioritize both your well-being and luxury.

2. The Hongqi H9: Elevating the concept of a luxury sedan, the H9 is a sanctuary of unmatched comfort adorned with the latest technological advancements. Aimed at catering to the discerning tech-savvy consumer, the H9 cockpit is outfitted with high-end features, including a crystal-clear 12-inch high-definition head-up display and a Level 2.5 intelligent advanced driver assistance system.

3. The Hongqi Ousado: Defining a new benchmark in sedan engineering, the Ousado combines a powerful two-liter turbocharged engine with an ultra-strong steel framework. With a remarkable horsepower of 223 and a peak torque output of 340NM, the Ousado provides an unparalleled driving experience that resonates with both power and safety.

Following the landmark unveiling event, the showcased Hongqi models are now open for public viewing at the state-of-the-art Hongqi Alghanim showroom in Shuwaikh. Upholding Alghanim Industries' long-standing commitment to customer excellence, the showroom offers more than just a glimpse of luxury vehicles. It provides a comprehensive, personalized experience for visitors, guided by knowledgeable staff eager to acquaint you with the distinctive features and innovations that set the Hongqi brand apart in the Kuwaiti market.



France taps nuclear know-how to recycle electric car batteries

BAGNOLS-SUR-CEZE, France: In the cradle of France's atomic program, researchers are using their nuclear know-how for a key project in the country's energy transition: recycling the raw materials in old electric car batteries, solar panels and wind turbines. The European Union has made building up its recycling capacity a key part of its strategy to become less reliant on Asia for critical metals such as lithium, nickel and silver.

The 27-nation bloc is trying to close the gap with China, which already recycles car batteries and has its own massive reserves of raw materials and refining capacity. Reusing old components could help countries such as France, which do not have mines and rely on imports, narrow the gap. The French atomic and alternative energy commission (CEA) is using its research facility in the southern centre

of Marcoule to find ways to recycle the components used for clean technologies.

The sprawling campus, where France's nuclear weapons and energy programs were born, is so sensitive that images of its location are blurred out or pixelated on Google Maps. But the CEA gave reporters a rare tour to show off its recycling work ahead of a conference on critical metals to be hosted by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in Paris on Thursday.

Many of the techniques used by Marcoule researchers come from their know-how in recycling nuclear waste, an area in which France is a world leader. The goal is to recover the materials and use them on an industrial scale, said Richard Laucournet, head of the new materials department at the CEA centre.

"We are looking at how to store, convert and transport electricity, and how to

make the energy transition efficient," said Laucournet. "Thanks to the simulation tools developed here, we can reprocess rare earths from magnets."

Black mass

In one lab, researchers peer into a meter-thick window as they operate large, bike handle-like robotic arms to cut out irradiated fuel rods. The alloy sections are placed in hot acid solutions to make the metal dissolve. Afterwards it can be extracted again via the use of organic solvents and decanters.

The process can recover lithium, nickel, cobalt and graphite from the black mass that comes from crushing the automobile electric battery cells. Researchers say the technique developed at Marcoule will be useful for recycling fuels from future fourth-generation nuclear reactors as well as rare earths from magnets. This technology is all the more useful since there is "no real magnet recycling sector" in the world except scrap in Asia, said Laucournet.

Another technique at the centre is to use carbon dioxide to detach and inflate

solar panel cells, allowing the recovery of silicon and the silver contained inside. For wind turbine blades, the CEA is applying the same process with "supercritical water" that it has been working on for 20 years in a bid to remove radioactivity from metals in a liquid

state. Supercritical water at very high temperature and high pressure has the power to penetrate inside the materials and to break the polymer chains of the fiberglass or carbon composites that make up wind turbine blades and hydrogen tanks. — AFP



This photograph taken on September 19, 2023, in Marcoule, southern France, shows a general view of the research centre of the Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission (CEA). Silver, nickel, lithium, palladium, rhodium: all metals are found in nature. — AFP

Business

UN: Decarbonizing shipping to cost over \$100bn per year

Global maritime trade volumes forecast to grow this year

GENEVA: The UN called for rapid decarbonization of the shipping industry on Wednesday, warning that the price tag could top \$100 billion a year as the sector's emissions continue to swell. The UN's trade and development agency, UNCTAD, highlighted the vital role shipping plays in the global economy, with over 80 percent of all traded goods in the world moved by sea. But it also accounts for nearly three percent of all greenhouse gas emissions globally.

At a time when industries are under pressure to reduce their carbon footprint to avert catastrophic climate change, emissions from the global maritime fleet has increased by 20 percent in the past decade. "We call for global action to decarbonize shipping," UNCTAD chief Rebeca Grynspan told reporters, presenting an annual report on the industry.

"Balancing environmental sustainability, regulatory compliance and economic demands is vital for a prosperous, equitable and resilient future for maritime transport," she said. The agency is calling for a rapid shift towards cleaner fuels across a shipping industry, where nearly 99 percent of the global fleet remains reliant on conventional fuels.

"Fuel transition in shipping is still in its infancy," Shamika Sirimanne, head of UNCTAD's technology and logistics division, told reporters. UNCTAD cited some promising developments, including that 21 percent of vessels currently on order are designed for alternative fuels.

But the agency stressed the need to step up the pace, while acknowledging that "the transition comes with substantial costs". The UNCTAD report found that up to \$28 billion would be required annually to decarbonize ships by 2050.

And even more investments—as much as \$90

billion—would be needed each year to develop the necessary infrastructure for 100 percent carbon neutral fuels by then, it said. In addition, full decarbonization could raise annual fuel expenses by as much as 100 percent, potentially taking a heavy toll on small island developing states and other poor countries that rely heavily on maritime transport.

Net-zero target

The International Maritime Organization clinched a deal in July to cut the shipping industry's total annual emissions by at least 20 percent by 2030 and by at least 70 percent by 2040 compared to 2008 levels. The revised strategy also aims for the industry to reach net-zero emissions "close to" 2050. That compared with the prior target for a 50-percent reduction by mid-century.

The IMO is discussing economic measures to generate funds to help support poorer countries' decarbonization efforts and close the price gap between traditional and alternative fuels. To ensure an equitable transition, UNCTAD is also calling for a universal regulatory framework, applicable to all, to help avoid a "two-speed decarbonization process". Clear regulations would help remove a large element of uncertainty facing the world's ship owners, many of whom are preparing to renew ageing fleets. At the start of 2023, the world's commercial ships were on average 22.2 years old, with more than half of the global fleet over 15 years of age.

"This is a challenge and an opportunity," Grynspan said, pointing out that it could provide incentive to build more sustainable ships. But given the current lack of clarity regarding regulations and incentives to shift to alternative fuels and green technologies,



The shipping industry accounts for nearly three percent of all greenhouse gas emissions globally. — AFP

ship owners in need of renewing their fleet could also opt for old-style ships that could roam the seas for decades. Wednesday's report highlighted that the global shipping industry remains resilient despite challenges stemming from the COVID pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine. Global maritime trade volumes and containerized trade are both forecast to grow this year after declining in 2022.

The report also pointed to how the Ukraine war

had "led to changes in shipping patterns and increased the distances travelled for commodities, especially oil and grain". Global oil cargo distances reached an all-time high last year. Grain shipments have also travelled further than in any year on record in 2023 as countries that have traditionally sources wheat and other products from Ukraine have been forced to find new suppliers such as the United States and Brazil, UNCTAD said. — AFP

France hopes for 'ambitious' growth in budget plan

PARIS: The French government on Wednesday presented a budget plan based on a buoyant growth prediction that raised eyebrows at France's public finance watchdog. Submitting his 2024 budget plan to President Emmanuel Macron's cabinet, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire put gross domestic product growth at 1.4 percent for next year, which compares to a 0.8 percent consensus among leading forecasters, and 0.9 percent from the country's central bank.

Pierre Moscovici, a former finance minister and now head of the independent HCFP watchdog that checks the realism of government predictions, called the forecast gap "big, very big" during a senate hearing. The government was "taking a gamble" with its growth outlook, he said. But Le Maire stood by his estimate, saying it was "responsible and sincere".

"We must be ambitious, if not optimistic," he added. Economic growth is the base for a host of other indicator estimates, including the public-sector deficit. Because of the doubts on growth, "some of the government's forecasts appear quite fragile", Moscovici said. Le Maire said the budget's overall themes were the fight against inflation and invest-

ment in the transition to a decarbonized economy, but acknowledged that, like many countries, France was still overcoming financial burdens brought on by the COVID pandemic and rising energy prices.

France still hopes to cut spending by around 16 billion euros (\$16.9 billion) next year—essentially by phasing out electricity price subsidies for households and companies -- and raise new revenues, including from a new motorway levy. France still has one of the eurozone's deepest public-sector deficits, at 4.9 percent of GDP, and is targeting 4.4 percent next year, an objective the HCFP called "optimistic". Only in 2027 does France hope to bring the deficit back below the three percent deficit ceiling for eurozone members, to 2.7 percent, Le Maire said.

Accumulated public-sector debt—which eurozone rules cap at 60 percent of GDP—is currently at 109.7 percent, and will fall only slightly in 2024, to 108.1 percent, according to the government, as pump price subsidies for low-income drivers are renewed.

According to government figures, debt servicing could rival education as France's biggest single budgetary expenditure next year.

The budget draft is likely to face a rough welcome in parliament, where President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party lost an absolute majority last year. As a result, the government may again resort to a controversial constitutional move—Article 49.3 -- to bypass a vote and pass the legislation, as it did earlier this year to push through unpopular pension reforms that sparked violent protests. — AFP



SAINT-ARNOULT-EN-YVELINES, France: Motorists queue in their vehicle on the A10 highway at the toll of Saint-Arnoult-en Yvelines, outside Paris. — AFP

Crypto firm Binance pulls out of Russia

PARIS: Cryptocurrency firm Binance said on Wednesday it was selling its Russia business, months after reports suggested US authorities were investigating possible sanctions violations. Bloomberg reported in May that the US Department of Justice was looking into claims Russians had used Binance to skirt US sanctions imposed over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The firm, which has faced severe regulatory hurdles across the world, has previously denied breaking sanctions but in a statement on Wednesday said it was making a "full exit" from the Russian market.

"As we look toward the future, we recognize that operating in Russia is not compatible with Binance's compliance strategy," chief compliance officer Noah Perlman said in a statement. The firm said the process would take a year to complete and would involve

selling its assets to CommEX, a company that only launched on Tuesday.

Iran controversy

In a message on X, formerly Twitter, reacting to the Binance deal, CommEX said: "A hearty welcome to our new users from Russia and around the world!" CommEX has a website and channels on the Telegram messaging app in Russian and English, but its representatives on Telegram deflected questions from users about its ownership and where it was based.

The firm did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. Binance runs crypto exchanges and provides other services across the world but it has taken a severe hit since crypto markets collapsed and regulators began probing the legality of its business. In November last year, the firm admitted its exchange had "interacted" with "bad actors" in Iran after Reuters reports alleged it had helped move billions of dollars in defiance of US sanctions. Binance was founded in 2017 in China by Canadian national Changpeng Zhao but following a crypto crackdown by Beijing, he moved its operations to locations including Singapore, Bahrain, Dubai, Paris and the Cayman Islands. — AFP

Russian economy to grow this year, says EBRD

LONDON: The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on Wednesday said it expected Russia's economy to grow in 2023 thanks to rising oil prices, having forecast a contraction earlier this year. The EBRD expects growth of 1.5 percent after predicting contraction of 1.5 percent in an estimate made in May.

"The outlook for 2024 will depend heavily on how the war on Ukraine and the related economic sanctions evolve; at this stage growth of 1.0 percent is projected," the bank said. Contacted by AFP, the bank explained that in May it expected Western sanctions against Russia, in particular a price cap on its oil exports, "to be more effective in constraining" the country's growth.

"But oil revenues have been supported by rising oil prices and Russia's ability to offset the impact of the cap by exporting to new markets," it said. The EBRD named such markets as China and India, adding that Russia's economic "activity has remained robust—particularly household consumption and government spending on the ongoing conflict".

Russia's central bank has forecast the country's economy to grow between 1.5 and 2.5 percent this year and between 0.5 and 1.5 percent in 2024 as Moscow grapples with labor shortages, sanctions and lower export revenues. The EBRD added that it expected the Ukraine economy to grow 1.0 percent this year "on more businesses resuming operations and improved energy supply".

It predicted output of 3.0 percent in 2024, "on the assumption that the war continues at the current intensity". Both forecasts were unchanged from May. The EBRD was founded in 1991 to help former Soviet bloc nations embrace free-market economies, but has since extended its reach to the Middle East and North Africa. The bank said growth in its regions would expand by an average 2.4 percent this year before picking up speed to register output of 3.2 percent in 2024 as inflation eases further. — AFP

Eurozone firms fret over stricter climate standards: Survey

FRANKFURT: Eurozone firms are more concerned about the potential impact of stricter climate standards on financing than more direct risks stemming from climate change, a European Central Bank survey showed Wednesday. The European Union—which includes the 20 countries that use the euro—is aiming to be climate-neutral by 2050, and is pushing a series of new rules in various areas to drive the green transition.

About 60 percent of companies questioned for the survey indicated they considered transition risks related to tougher climate standards, like carbon pricing, as "very important", with large firms more concerned than smaller ones. When it came to natural hazards, such as wildfires or floods, 39 percent of respondents were very concerned while 48 percent had the same level of concern in relation to environmental degradation.

Concerns about natural disasters were more pronounced in coastal areas and regions that have previously experienced more fires. The survey showed companies were worried about obstacles in securing access to financing for investments to deal with climate change-related risks. — AFP



WASHINGTON: The US Capitol in Washington, DC, on September 26, 2023. Millions of Americans braced on September 25, 2023, for pay and welfare checks to stop within days as Congress careened toward a damaging government shutdown, with Republican right wingers blocking attempts to pass a budget. -- AFP

As shutdown looms, US Senate proposes short-term budget fix

WASHINGTON: The US Senate drafted a last-ditch short-term budget proposal Tuesday as time was running out for Congress to avoid a partial government shutdown, though the odds of it passing the House remained slim.

With just days left before the September 30 deadline, both Democratic Senate Majority leader Chuck Schumer and Republican minority leader Mitch McConnell endorsed the draft, which would keep the government open until November 17.

But there was no immediate indication that the warring factions of House Republicans, who have forced the showdown over government funding, would take it up if passed in the Senate. "Shutting the government down over a domestic budget dispute doesn't strengthen anyone's political position," McConnell said.

"It just puts important progress on ice. And it leaves millions of Americans on edge," he said. The White House joined McConnell in pushing for Congress to adopt the Senate package, with President Joe Biden, speaking at a campaign event Tuesday evening, saying that "it's time for Republicans in the House of Representatives to start doing their job."

If a deal isn't reached by Saturday, hundreds of thousands of federal employees could be furloughed, curtailing a wide swath of government services. That could mean welfare recipients don't get payments they depend on, and airport operations could slow, snarling travel plans for millions.

Some employees would continue to work—like the military and others deemed essential—but would not get their paychecks, until a budget is finally passed. Biden placed the blame on a small group of "extremist" Republican lawmakers.

The House hardliners "are determined to shut down the government," Biden said in an earlier video message. Meanwhile the Republican mainstream "refuse... to stand up to the extremists in their party," Biden said. "So now everyone in America could be forced to pay the price," he said.

The Senate draft confirmed that Ukraine, which has been battling Russian invaders for more than a year and a half, could find its lifeline of US arms and economic aid under threat.

Last week Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Capitol Hill to try to convince the slowly growing number of skeptical Republican members of Congress not to give up on his country. But after Biden asked Congress for \$24 billion for Kyiv, the short-term Senate measure released Tuesday allocated just \$6.1 billion. Hardliners in the House have said they don't want any more money going to Kyiv, after the \$110 billion already provided since the invasion began in February 2022. "They're picking Ukraine over Americans," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said late Tuesday night. — AFP

Indian great-grandmother, 92, finally goes to school

An Indian great-grandmother aged 92 has learned to read and write after going to school for the first time and inspiring others to join her, media and officials said Wednesday. Salima Khan, born in around 1931 and who was married at the age of 14 - two years before the end of British colonial rule in India - had a lifelong dream of being able to read and write. Khan, from Bulandshahr in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, said there were no schools in her village when she was a girl. Six months ago, she began studying alongside pupils eight decades younger than her, and she is

accompanied on her way to class by her grandson's wife.

Her story emerged after a video of her counting from one to 100 went viral on social media. "My grandchildren used to trick me into giving them extra money as I couldn't count currency notes," she was quoted as saying by the Times of India. "Those days are gone." India's literacy rate is around 73 percent, according to the 2011 census.

"Her story reinforces the belief that the pursuit of knowledge is not limited by age," local education officer Lakshmi Pandey told AFP. Volunteers from a gov-

ernment education initiative had identified Khan as a potential student and encouraged her to go to school, Pandey said. School headmistress Pratibha Sharma said teachers had been initially "hesitant" about embarking on teaching Khan, but were won over by her "passion" to study. "We didn't have the heart to refuse her", Sharma told the Times of India. Since she went to school, 25 women from her village have also started literacy classes, including two daughters-in-law, Sharma told the daily. — AFP



People walk at one of the restaurants and cafes at the "One thousand And One Nights" entertainment resort on the bank of the Tigris River in Baghdad. - AFP photos

On a summer evening, Iraqis smoke shisha and go bowling at a sprawling riverside complex in Baghdad, one of the many new investments reviving the capital after decades of turmoil. "Iraq is fertile ground for investments," said Falah Hassan, the executive director of the complex of restaurants and shops built on the grounds of one of Saddam Hussein's former palaces and named after

security environment, administrative inefficiencies, and systemic corruption". Hassan acknowledged investors still faced numerous obstacles, including "the security situation" and "bureaucracy". "You have to go through 1,000 counters to get a single permit," he said, noting the new "1,001 Nights Park" complex perched on Baghdad's Tigris river was opened in late 2022 by "young investors".



Waiters walk at one of the restaurants and cafes at the "One thousand And One Nights" entertainment resort.

dirty money is behind many of the new developments seen in Baghdad. "In recent years, Iraq's political elite and their business associates have preferred to invest their wealth in local projects as a safe haven for ill-gotten gains," wrote Hayder al-Shakeri in a piece for the Institute of Regional and International Studies at American University of Iraq, Sulaimani.

"In part to disguise the origins of

ported. These generous allocations are made possible by Iraq's tremendous oil wealth and foreign reserves, which amount to more than \$100 billion.



People walk past a bowling alley at the "One thousand And One Nights" entertainment resort.

'No water, no electricity'

In the neighborhood of Kufa on Baghdad's outskirts, a bulldozer digs up the road to install pipes, while a dump truck removes the rubble. A special unit is working to rehabilitate the many informal neighborhoods of Baghdad "deprived of services for more than 20 years", said Abdel Razzak Abd Mhessein, the project's head engineer. The unit is made up of people from various ministries, state-owned enterprises as well as engineers from the army and paramilitary network, the Popular Mobilization Forces.

"We have a budget of about 200 billion dinars (\$150 million) for infrastructure work for water, sewer systems and more," the engineer told AFP. "There are more than 1,093 informal neighborhoods in Baghdad — a plan has been prepared to gradually carry out work there," he added. The public's reaction to the work so far has been mixed. "This is what we dreamed of. Paved roads, and services," said Abu Ali Al-Bahadli, a 55-year-old day laborer.

"Before, we couldn't go out when it rained. The road was muddy and the sewers overflowed." His neighbor, Ahmed Radi, is more skeptical, noting work on his street had not brought him adequate electricity or running water.

"Tell me, which official would accept staying even an hour without water," said the 45-year-old civil servant. "When will they install pavements? Storm water drains?" he asked. "We come home tired from work. There's no water, no electricity. For how long?" — AFP



'Fertile ground': Baghdad sees timid revival with investment drive

the famed "One Thousand and One Nights" folktales.

In oil-rich Iraq, the fragile stability since the defeat of the Islamic State group in 2017 has paved the way for a building boom in a city that in recent years has mainly made headlines for wars and bloody violence. Since taking office in October, Iraq's Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani has sought to rehabilitate Baghdad's infrastructure, much of which has been left dilapidated by conflict and neglect.

But a World Bank report in July said investors were still hesitant to put their money in Iraq, citing a "lack of business-friendly legislation, a volatile

'Epidemic of corruption'

This is a reality authorities say they are committed to changing to attract investors, especially from the Gulf. In late August, Sudani attended the groundbreaking ceremony for a luxury hotel and residential complex, the first major Qatari investment in Baghdad. "From the prime minister to the lowest-ranking official, we will stand alongside investors and the private sector to carry out projects in Baghdad and the provinces," the Iraqi leader said.

At the United Nations General Assembly last week, Sudani said "our top priority is the fight against the epidemic of corruption". But experts say

their illegally obtained funds, the political elite have allegedly taken to investing in upscale residential compounds, malls, private universities, and other real estate ventures, resulting in a 'visible boom' in Baghdad's development," he added. In less than a year, Sudani has undertaken work to provide improved water and electricity services to Baghdad's informal neighborhoods, construct bridges and redesign the streets of one of the Arab world's most populous cities.

In the 2023-2025 budget passed this year, annual investment expenses are set to hit \$37 billion — three times the amount in 2022, the World Bank re-



Boats are moored by a pier belonging to the "One thousand And One Nights" entertainment resort.



People stand on boats moored by a pier belonging to the "One thousand And One Nights" entertainment resort.

Taylor Swift 'Eras' tour concert film going global

Taylor Swift's "Eras Tour" concert film is expected to be the cinematic event of the season — and now it's going global, with tickets expected to go on sale in more than 100 countries. The film was already slated for an October 13 release in North America but will now be available from that date at cinemas worldwide, including every Odeon location across Europe, according to a Tuesday statement from theater giant AMC. "The tour isn't the only thing we're taking worldwide... Been so excited to tell you all that The Eras Tour concert film is now officially coming to theaters WORLDWIDE on Oct 13!" Swift posted on Instagram.

When 33-year-old Swift first announced the film it broke the record for pre-sales in the United States in one day, raking in \$37 million. It's expected the film could exceed \$100 million in North America on its opening weekend. "I think we could be talking about the biggest film of the fall season, which is pretty incredible," Jeff Bock, an analyst for box office tracker Exhibitor Relations, recently told AFP. Swift is taking a break from her wildly popular tour that began in March — performances will resume in November and run late into next year. Some analysts expect it will become the first tour to break the symbolic \$1-billion mark. Over the weekend Swift made news not for the tour but for her love life, fueling rumors around her possible relationship with NFL star Travis Kelce when she was seen watching the Super Bowl winner's game from a luxury box alongside the tight end's mother. — AFP



A Fedora hat that belonged to US singer Michael Jackson, made of wool and lined with silk, is displayed before being put on sale at auction, in Paris. — AFP

Michael Jackson moonwalk hat sells for 77,640 euros

The hat that Michael Jackson wore just before performing his signature moonwalk dance for the first time sold at an auction in Paris on Tuesday for 77,640 euros (\$82,170). The black fedora had been estimated at 60,000 to 100,000 euros by the Hotel Drouot auction house. It was the highlight among around 200 items of rock memorabilia, though the top price went to a guitar owned by the legendary bluesman T-Bone Walker, at 129,400 euros. Jackson 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, he showed off what would become his trademark move — the moonwalk, a seemingly effortless backwards glide while appearing to walk forwards. Music memorabilia has become big business.

Co-organizers Lemon Auction made a splash last year with the sale of the 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" — brought in a total of 46.5 million euros for Sotheby's, attracting bidders from 76 countries. — AFP

Lifestyle

Christian Dior mocked sexist stereotypes while Saint Laurent was inspired by female pioneers at their Paris Fashion Week shows on Tuesday. Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri was coming off a PR coup after dressing Queen Camilla in a billowing midnight-blue silk



Models present creations for Saint Laurent during the Paris Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024 in Paris.

dress for the state dinner at Versailles earlier this month. "I'm very happy to have had this chance. These are historic moments," Chiuri told AFP of her royal appointment. For her new ready-to-wear collection, she plastered the walls with fake ads playing on sexist slogans from the past, such as "Save your marriage—iron properly" and "Put on a stunning makeup to make up with your man".



Dior and Saint Laurent bring contrasting feminisms to Paris

The Italian designer said the clothes were inspired by the "world of witches, and stereotypes around them from our childhood, as well as the stereotypical image of Parisian women". "These stories influence the way we see ourselves," she added. Among the stars in the front row were actors Charlize Theron, Jennifer Lawrence and Robert Pattinson. Despite the bright fuchsia and yellow backdrop of the show, the outfits were largely sombre with comfortable, breezy items alongside straight masculine jackets, pleated skirts and plenty of knitwear.

Dior's emblematic mille-fleurs motif was transformed into a contrasting floral X-ray in black and white. "I like to give this idea of evanescence through fabrics," Chiuri said. Later, Saint

Laurent took a different approach to feminism, with a typically opulent nighttime show under the glittering lights of the Eiffel Tower.

Creative director Anthony Vaccarello doubled down on his taste for 1980s glamour, with big shoulders and tightly belted waists, and lots of aviator shades—this time, even adding the Top Gun theme song "Take My Breath Away" to the soundtrack. But there

were also safari suits and cargo trousers, with Vaccarello saying he was inspired by pioneering women such as Amelia Earhart and Adrienne Bolland who had "infiltrated domains previously considered exclusively male, such as aviation and automobile racing". The palette was all burnished gold, ochre and maroon on shimmering dresses, razor-sharp heels and impossibly thin models.—AFP

Models present creations for Christian Dior during a show as part of the Paris Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024 in Paris.—AFP photos



Sports

Foster makes nine changes to New Zealand team to face Italy

'We've got four locks who we're pretty happy with their form'

LYON: Sam Whitelock is set to break the New Zealand Test appearances record he shares with Richie McCaw after head coach Ian Foster on Wednesday named him on the bench to face Italy at the World Cup. Whitelock is locked on 148 All Black caps with former captain McCaw. "This is a credit to Sam, every game he's achieving something new at the moment," said Foster. "He equalled a record the last match, he's going to beat it this week, he's got 150 coming up and then the most capped All Black in World Cups."

Foster made nine changes to the All Blacks team for Friday's match in Lyon, which comes two weeks after they romped to a 71-3 victory over Namibia, with a largely second string side. A host of players rested for that match are back in the starting XV, along with flanker Shannon Frizell and centre Jordie Barrett following injury. Ardie Savea captains the side from No.8 while Scott Barrett and Brodie Retallick get the nod over Whitelock in the second row. But Foster denied this meant Barrett and Retallick were now his starting second row pairing.

"I won't commit to saying that's the absolute pecking order but we just feel that right now it's the right one for this game," he said. "We've got four locks who we're pretty happy with their form. We've got Brodie who's coming back from injuries. He missed a bit of rugby. "He played a little bit in that France game, he got 55 minutes against Namibia, so we feel he needs more time (on the pitch)."

'History means nothing'

Aaron Smith and Richie Mo'unga resume the half-back partnership Foster picked for New Zealand's tournament opener, a 27-13 loss to hosts France. Young prop Tamiti Williams is due to make his World Cup debut after being named on the bench as Ethan de Groot is suspended.

Otherwise it is a very experienced bench with hooker Dane Coles, 36, backrower Sam Cane, 31, and 34-year-old Whitelock amongst the replacements. "We're expecting a lot of emotion out there and to have the likes of Dane and the two Sams on the bench to come off there and to bring a slightly



BORDEAUX: New Zealand's fly-half Beauden Barrett (C) takes part in a training session at Chaban-Delmas stadium in Bordeaux, as part of the 2023 Rugby World Cup. — AFP

level-headed approach in the last part is going to be important for us," said Foster.

The inclusion of Damian McKenzie on the bench means Foster could bring him on and play three of the world's best fly-halves — Mo'unga and full-back Beauden Barrett the other two — in his backline all together. "He's earned the right to do that, he's playing well, training well," Foster said of McKenzie. "It's a chance for us to look at how we can inject him into that space. That obviously changes the configuration and coverage we have in the backs, but we've been working on that."

New Zealand have beaten Italy in all 15 previous matches by an average of more than 50 points. But Foster feels the current Azzurri side are a different proposition to what the All Blacks have faced before. "History means nothing, history is yesterday's

newspaper, it's not tomorrow's," he said. "We've seen them leading France into the last 10 minutes of a Six Nations game, we've seen them pushing Ireland right to the end, so if you look at the recent form, they're playing well and that's the Italy we expect to turn up."

Team (15-1):

Beauden Barrett; Will Jordan, Rieko Ioane, Jordie Barrett, Mark Tele'a; Richie Mo'unga, Aaron Smith; Ardie Savea (capt), Dalton Papali'i, Shannon Frizell; Scott Barrett, Brodie Retallick; Nepo Laulala, Codie Taylor, Ofa Tu'ungafasi

Replacements: Dane Coles, Tamaiti Williams, Tyrel Lomax, Samuel Whitelock, Sam Cane, Cam Roigard, Damian McKenzie, Anton Lienert-Brown
Coach: Ian Foster (NZL). — AFP

The great Indian dope trick: Only one athlete runs in final

NEW DELHI: An Indian athletics competition ended in farce when just one sprinter competed in the 100-metre final and another continued running beyond the finishing line chased by national anti-doping officers, officials said on Wednesday. Several winners also skipped the medal ceremony fearing being asked to give samples during the Delhi State Athletics Championship, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

Officials told AFP that the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) arrived to conduct tests at the event on Tuesday, resulting in the number of participants on the third and final day of the competition falling by half. The visit came a day after a video shared on social media appeared to show a washroom in the capital's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium littered with syringes and packets of the performance-enhancing drug Erythropoietin (EPO).

"We had written to the NADA on the second day of the competition asking them to come for testing," Sandeep Mehta, secretary of the Delhi Athletics Association told AFP on Wednesday. "They have the full right to test those who disappeared. We will ban the athletes if they test positive and also recommend the national athletics body to do the same."

Indian sports has been rocked by several doping scandals with athletes testing positive during the Olympics, the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games, and 45 athletes have been suspended this year. Lalit Kumar was the lone athlete in the 100-metre final, winning after the seven other sprinters backed out, reporting they had muscle strains or cramp. "I was really looking forward to running against the best athletes, but nobody turned up," Kumar told the English-language newspaper. "Everyone was scared of getting tested. As an athlete, I feel very hurt and let down." — AFP

'Positive mindset'

The results were dramatic. In their first series after the 2015 World Cup England posted their first 400-plus total during a five-match series against New Zealand that they won 3-2. Boasting a batting line-up including Jonny Bairstow and current skipper Jos Buttler, they lifted the world record for an ODI total to 444 in 2016, 481 in 2018 and 498, against the Netherlands, last year.

With such batting power, England's bowlers were encouraged to attack, rather than worry too much

still going to be there? Does he play the way we want to play? If not, they were nowhere near the squad."

England boosted their ODI schedule, with leg-spinner Adil Rashid, a key bowler in Morgan's line-up, playing 83 50-over matches between the 2015 and 2019 editions. Using the knowledge gained from his time playing in the Indian Premier League and following the example of the New Zealand side who had hammered England at the 2015 World Cup on the way to the final, Morgan insisted on an aggressive batting approach.



NOTTINGHAM: England's George Scrimshaw (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Ireland's Andrew Balbirnie during the second One Day International (ODI) cricket match between England and Ireland at Trent Bridge cricket ground in Nottingham. — AFP

Absent Ryder Cup veterans 'missing being here': McIlroy

ROME: Rory McIlroy on Wednesday said European stalwarts absent from this week's Ryder Cup in Rome after joining LIV Golf will be "missing being here more than we're missing them". McIlroy is the most experienced player on either team as he prepares for the start of his seventh Ryder Cup on Friday. The event will be the first without any of Lee Westwood, Sergio Garcia or Ian Poulter lining up for Europe since 1995 after the trio signed with Saudi-backed LIV and resigned from the European Tour. "It's certainly a little strange not having them around," McIlroy, who has been an ever-present at the Ryder Cup since making his debut in 2010, told reporters.

"But I think this week of all weeks, it's going to hit home with them that, they are not here, and I think they are going to miss being here more than we're missing them." McIlroy was a vocal critic of LIV when the rebel circuit was first launched, but has commented less on the rift since a financial merger with the PGA and European tours was announced earlier this year. "It's just more I think this week is a realization that the decision that they made has led to not being a part of this week, and that's tough," the Northern Irishman clarified. "The landscape in golf is ever-changing and more dynamic, and we'll see what happens and whether they will be part of it in the future."

McIlroy is the third-oldest player in Luke Donald's European team, which includes four rookies, a far cry from when he first played as a 21-year-old at Celtic Manor. He was widely criticized for comments made in 2009 calling the Ryder Cup "an exhibition" and "not that important". The four-time major champion read out those quotes in a social media video released by the European team earlier this week, jokingly asking "who said that?". "I think in 2009, I was just so focused on myself and trying to get my career off the ground that I felt like I had sort of bigger and better things to achieve for my individual goals and stuff like that, that I just didn't put any emphasis on making a Ryder Cup team," he said.

"Until you make one, and then you never want to be off one again. I think that's sort of the crux of it. So I love being a part of this team. My most enjoyable moments in my career have been being a part of European Ryder Cup teams." The new-look European side will be trying to wrestle back the trophy from the United States following a record 19-9 defeat at Whistling Straits in 2021. Justin Rose, who missed out on selection two years ago, is the elder statesman this time around at 43. "You start to get the rookies off to a good start this year at home, and suddenly you start to bleed some of the future with positive experiences," said former world number one Rose. — AFP



ROME: (L-R) English golfer with a disability, Kipp Popert, Member of Dude Perfect, Garrett Hilbert, Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic, Former Welsh footballer Gareth Bale, Former European Ryder Cup captain, Colin Montgomerie and Italian surfer Leonardo Fioravanti pose with the trophy. — AFP



TOKYO: Iga Swiatek of Poland serves against Mai Hontama of Japan during their women's singles match on day three of the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo. — AFP

Swiatek, Pegula into Pan Pacific Open q-finals

TOKYO: Four-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek and world number four Jessica Pegula surged into the quarter-finals of the WTA Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Wednesday with straight-sets victories. Poland's former world number one Swiatek beat Japan's spirited Mai Hontama 6-4, 7-5 and faces Russia's Veronika Kudermetova in the last eight.

"I didn't really start well," Swiatek, the top seed and now second in the world, said. Swiatek reeled off five games on the bounce to finally break the resolve

England bid to join elite company in retaining WCup

LONDON: England head to the World Cup in India aiming to become just the third team to retain their title and seeking to underline their status as the pre-eminent force in white-ball cricket. As recently as 2015, England suffered a humiliating group-stage exit but they are now the reigning world champions in both men's one-day international and Twenty20 cricket.

Test cricket, particularly Ashes series against Australia, has long been regarded as the pinnacle for England players. But a 15-run defeat by Bangladesh in Adelaide that knocked England out of the 2015 World Cup prompted a rethink. Andrew Strauss, who took over as managing director of England cricket after the debacle, encouraged greater separation between the Test and limited-overs teams. The former Ashes-winning captain sacked Peter Moores as coach and appointed Trevor Bayliss, primarily for his white-ball knowledge.

Significantly, Eoin Morgan was retained as limited-overs captain. There was also greater continuity of selection. Team analyst Nathan Leamon, quoted in "White Hot: The Inside Story of England Cricket's Double World Championships", said the focus was on the long-term. "We suddenly stopped selecting for the next series and started selecting for the World Cup in four years' time," he said. "They were asking, 'Is this player

about restricting the run-rate. Pace greats James Anderson and Stuart Broad became Test specialists while Chris Woakes and Liam Plunkett were identified as key one-day bowlers. Morgan was also prepared to be ruthless, jettisoning ODI regular David Willey on the eve of the 2019 World Cup to bring the newly qualified Jofra Archer into the squad—a move vindicated by the express quick's performances. Even then, with all their meticulous planning and the form of multi-format stars such as Joe Root and Ben Stokes, England still needed a Super Over to finally see off New Zealand in a thrilling World Cup final at Lord's for the country's first triumph in tournament history. Four years on, can they retain their title in India? England, bidding to equal the West Indies and Australia by winning consecutive World Cups, have played only about half the number of ODIs in the four years since the 2019 edition compared with the previous four-year cycle as Tests and T20s became the focus of attention again.

Due in part to franchise commitments around the globe, they have not always fielded a full-strength side. "It's been very different since 2019, for a number of reasons," Root told author Matt Rollier earlier this year, while at the IPL with Rajasthan Royals. "The 50-over game has suffered the most — that has been the format where you haven't consistently got the best teams being put out." But the fact the bulk of the squad have played in the IPL means Ahmedabad, where England begin their World Cup campaign against New Zealand on October 5, will be a familiar venue. Harry Brook, at 24, is the only specialist England batsman under 30 but Buttler told The Times last month: "If people are still performing, age is irrelevant." — AFP

Sports

Man Utd dismiss Palace in League Cup as Wolves, Luton crash

United look to extend their winning run when Palace return to Old Trafford

ASIAN GAMES



— AFP Photos

LONDON: Manchester United kept the critics at bay as they cruised into the League Cup fourth round with a 3-0 win against Crystal Palace on Tuesday. United boss Erik ten Hag and his players have been under fire after a disappointing start to the season. But, following Saturday's narrow Premier League victory at Burnley, they secured a second successive win to ease the pressure at least a little.

Alejandro Garnacho put them ahead in the first half and Casemiro doubled the lead before the interval, with Anthony Martial sealing the victory after the break. When United lifted the League Cup in February to end a six-year trophy drought, it was seen as the start of a new era of success at Old Trafford. Instead, United have been engulfed by a series of problems on and off the pitch.

Having lost three of their first five league games to severely damage their title hopes, Ten Hag was under mounting scrutiny until the last four days offered a ray of hope. Ten Hag made a point of applauding the crowd and waving to all corners of Old Trafford before kick-off, setting the tone for an uplifting evening as his decision to make seven changes paid off.

Dean Henderson was making his Palace debut after leaving United a month ago, but the keeper's return lasted just 19 minutes before he limped off injured. Henderson's replacement Sam Johnstone had to pick the ball out of the net moments after coming on as United took a 21st minute lead.

Diogo Dalot's cross arrowed towards Garnacho and the Argentine winger swivelled to fire a low strike past Johnstone from 10 yards. Casemiro increased United's advantage six minutes later, climbing highest to meet Mason Mount's corner with a glancing header that gave Johnstone no chance.

United's third arrived in the 55th minute when Martial rifled home from Casemiro's cross. Giving further encouragement to Ten Hag, Morocco's



MANCHESTER: Crystal Palace's English defender #17 Nathaniel Clyne (L) fights for the ball with Manchester United's Argentinian midfielder #17 Alejandro Garnacho (R) during the English League Cup third round football match between Manchester United and Crystal Palace at Old Trafford in Manchester. — AFP

Sofyan Amrabat impressed on his first start since his deadline-day loan switch from Fiorentina.

Amrabat lined up a stand-in left-back role before switching to his preferred central midfield position after half-time. United will look to extend their winning run when Palace return to Old Trafford in the league on Saturday.

Luton rocked

Luton's difficult start to the season hit a new low with a shock 1-0 defeat at third tier Exeter. Luton enjoyed a fairytale promotion to the Premier League last season, but they are winless after five games in the top-flight. Rob Edwards' side claimed their first

point of the season against Wolves on Saturday.

However, Edwards' decision to make 10 changes backfired as Demetri Mitchell bagged Exeter's 83rd-minute winner with a close-range finish before he was sent off in the final moments. Wolves were the other Premier League side to suffer an embarrassing exit as they blew a two-goal lead in a 3-2 defeat at Ipswich Gary O'Neill made 10 changes against the Championship high-flyers and his understudies raced ahead thanks to goals from Hwang Hee-chan and Toti Gomes in the first 15 minutes. But Omari Hutchinson, on loan from Chelsea, got one back in the 28th minute and Freddie Ladapo levelled seven minutes before half-time. — AFP

Spain find fragile peace, progress after Rubiales scandal

CORDOVA: Spain's women's national team took one step towards the Olympic Games and several more towards equality, over a tense fortnight out of which a fragile peace emerged. "Yes, we are happy," said defender Olga Carmona, after Spain thrashed Switzerland 5-0 in the Nations League in front of a record crowd in Cordoba, when asked if she wanted the current coach, Montse Tome, and her staff to stay.

Spain presented the Women's World Cup trophy, won in August, to over 14,000 supporters — a new highest attendance for the team on home soil, with players doing a lap of honor at the end, delighted to focus on football again. The team's joy in Sydney was irrevocably tainted by the actions of disgraced former Spanish football federation president Luis Rubiales, who forcibly kissed midfielder Jenni Hermoso on the lips during the medal ceremony.

It sparked a worldwide backlash, with over 80 players striking against the national team, with Rubiales eventually resigning three weeks later, still insisting the kiss was consensual. The players capitalized on the chance to push through changes they had been demanding for months, years, "decades" even, according to captain Alexia Putellas.

The two-time Ballon d'Or winner and her Barcelona team-mate Irene Paredes were voted in as the squad's new leaders, for these Nations League matches at least, by their team-mates, under new coach Montse Tome.

The 41-year-old was initially viewed with great suspicion by the squad, as disliked former coach Jorge Vilda's assistant. Before the World Cup 15 Spain stars staged another strike, against Vilda's methods and other federation issues, although many eventually relented.

In the wake of the Rubiales scandal, Vilda was sacked, with the federation scrambling to appease



CORDOVA: Spain's forward #08 Mariona Caldentey is challenged by Switzerland's defender #05 Noelle Maritz and Switzerland's goalkeeper #21 Elvira Herzog during the UEFA Women's Nations League football match between Spain and Switzerland, at the Nuevo Arcangel stadium in Cordoba. — AFP

players and polish to their sullied image, at a time when they are bidding for the 2030 men's World Cup. Despite Vilda and Rubiales' eventual departure, 39 players stayed on strike, demanding further changes in the federation, including "zero tolerance" for anyone infringing on the dignity of women's football, and other logistical improvements.

Government intervention

With the Nations League games against Sweden and Switzerland approaching fast, Tome selected a 23 player squad, the vast majority of whom were still on strike. It created outrage among players, who gathered at the camp on Spain's east coast in the small town of Oliva, only because of the threat of losing their licences to play if they disobeyed. The Spanish government intervened, and in a meeting which stretched into the early hours of the morning, a deal was struck between the players, the federa-

tion and the CSD (Spain's sports council).

Two players, Mapi Leon and Patri Guijarro, departed, but the rest stayed, with Putellas and Paredes explaining it was the best way to ensure the pledged progress would happen. Putellas described the deal hopefully as a "turning point" for society, but Paredes said it was a long process and they still "can't see the light at the end of the tunnel".

The changes are happening. The federation sacked general secretary Andreu Camps, while other heads will roll in weeks to come. Rubiales is in court on sexual assault charges over the kiss and has been given a restraining order preventing him coming into contact with Hermoso. "If you don't fight, there's no prize," Cristina Fuentesal, 25, a teaching assistant from Malaga, told AFP, as she waited for Spain's team bus to arrive in Cordoba. "The players have fought, knowing what's going on inside the federation — we're with them until the end." — AFP

Ajax misery deepens with 4-0 loss

THE HAGUE: The crisis at Dutch giants Ajax went from bad to worse Wednesday as arch-rivals Feyenoord piled on the misery, completing a 4-0 win in a game rescheduled after crowd violence. Feyenoord striker Santiago Gimenez completed his hat-trick only four minutes after the game was restarted at 55 minutes, the time Sunday's match was called

off after Ajax fans hurled flares onto the pitch with their rivals 3-0 up.

In reality, nearly three days had elapsed between Gimenez's second and third goals, his hat-trick coming as he bundled in after a goalmouth scramble at a fan-less Johan Cruyff arena. The loss plunges Ajax deeper into crisis, with the four-time European champions suffering their worst start to a Dutch top-flight season since 1964/5, when their iconic legend Cruyff had just begun in the youth team.

Five points from five games leaves Ajax in unfamiliar territory, 14th in the Eredivisie, only two points from the drop and 10 points behind runaway leaders PSV Eindhoven. Ajax's struggles continue off the pitch as well. The club sacked director of football

Sven Mislintat on Sunday just hours after violent scenes at the stadium.

Home fans fought running battles with mounted riot police who had to fire tear gas to disperse the crowd. Some fans smashed through the glass doors of the stadium, while the players and officials were kept in their dressing rooms for safety.

Mislintat was under external investigation for a possible conflict of interest over the last-minute transfer in the summer of Croatian international defender Borna Sosa from VfB Stuttgart — where he had once been sporting director. The club denied that the sacking had anything to do with the probe, citing "the lack of broad support within the organization" as the reason behind the decision. — 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 Hospital	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, Nagidi Jayamma, holder of passport No. L4905292, do hereby change my name to Tirumani (as given name), Varalashmi (surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Tirumani Varalashmi and i also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#4236) 28/9/2023

Zhang breaks Asian Games record

Rampant Nepal smash multiple records in cricket history

HANGZHOU: World champion swimmer Zhang Yufei sent a major message to her Paris 2024 rivals on Wednesday at the Asian Games as Nepal smashed multiple records in the cricket. Hosts China lead the medals table with 76 golds, far ahead of South Korea (19) and Japan (15), after adding titles in a range of sports from artistic gymnastics and chess to beach volleyball and swimming.

The home nation and Zhang in particular have been in ominous form in the pool in Hangzhou, with the Paris Olympics coming up fast, just 10 months away. The 25-year-old Zhang blasted the fastest time of the year to easily win the 100m butterfly gold, then helped China to come within a whisker of shattering the 4x100m mixed medley relay world record.

Zhang, who has already claimed the 200m fly crown in Hangzhou to go with her Olympic gold, surged to the wall in a new Games-record 55.86sec. That beat the 56.12 that earned her the world title in July, but she wasn't happy. "It doesn't feel so good. This wasn't the record I wanted, I wanted the world record," she said. "I was aiming for it because even if I couldn't break it, I wanted to come close."

Swedish great Sarah Sjöström has held the world mark of 55.48 since the 2016 Rio Olympics. Zhang suited up again for the relay, part of a powerhouse team featuring triple breaststroke world champion Qin Haiyang, backstroker Xu Jiayu and freestyler Yang Junxuan.

They clocked 3:37.73 -- the second fastest of all-time behind Britain's 3:37.58, set at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. China took home gold in four of the seven finals on the evening, with Japan (two) and South Korea (one) winning the others.

Nepal smash records

In hazy morning sunshine on day four of the Games, rampant Nepal rewrote the T20 international record books against bewildered part-timers Mongolia in a 273-run thumping in men's cricket. Nepal bludgeoned 314-3 in their 20 overs, beating the previous highest T20 men's international innings of 278-3 by Afghanistan against Ireland in 2019.

Teenager Kushal Malla, batting number three, spearheaded the onslaught by crashing the fastest T20 international century, off 34 balls. Among the other records they racked up, Dipendra Singh Airee hit a scarcely believable eight sixes in an unbeaten 52 off 10 balls.

The powerful 23-year-old raced to his fifty off nine balls, another T20 world record and one that should stand in perpetuity because it is mathematically impossible to reach the landmark any quicker. Nepal's 26 sixes in the innings was also the best ever. Mongolia, whose women's team were bowled out for just 15 at the Asian Games last week, were dismissed for only 41 in 13.1 overs. Much sterner tests await for Nepal, with India and Pakistan both in the draw. In another gold rush for hosts China, they won the women's and men's street finals in skateboarding thanks to a couple of teenagers. The 16-year-old Zhang Jie triumphed in the men's and



HANGZHOU: (L to R) Silver medallist China's Yu Liyan, gold medallist China's Zhang Yufei and bronze medallist Japan's Hiroko Makino celebrate during the medals ceremony in the women's 200m butterfly final during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

Cui Chenxi, just 13, won the women's. But China did not have it all their own way as Japan won all three golds on offer on the day on the cycling track ahead of the hosts. Japan sped to victory in women's and men's team pursuit, and in women's keirin. Japan's Naoki Kojima said he and his teammates were celebrating well before they crossed the line in the men's team pursuit.

"In the last three or four laps we knew that we'd win," he said. "I was behind my teammates and I was supposed to lead the last lap. "I checked the other riders and I knew we had enough power to win. "We were actually already celebrating during the last three or four laps."

In other sports, Chinese table tennis legend Ma Long, 34, said he had almost certainly made his last Asian Games appearance after helping the hosts to men's team gold. Asked about the prospect of defending his Olympic title next year, Ma said: "Paris is still too early to say for me." — AFP

she said. "This competition is different from other competitions, so I especially wanted to win this one."

Cui's teammate Zhang Jie made it a China double when he won the men's street gold later in the day. The 16-year-old landed three of his individual tricks to win the competition with 231.14 points, ahead of Indonesia's Sanggoe Darma Tanjung on 200.63 and China's Su Jianjun on 195.73. Holly tipped Japanese 13-year-old Ginwoo Onodera, who became the youngest-ever street skateboarding champion at the X Games this year, failed to land a single individual trick and finished seventh.

Zhang said he was excited to win a gold that he "never saw coming", after making sure he landed his tricks cleanly. "Many of them went for difficult tricks," he said. "I went for tricks that weren't so difficult."

Onodera won praise from skating legends Tony Hawk and Nyjah Huston after also finishing third at the world championships. He led after the starting multi-trick run section but then faded badly, failing to land all five of his individual trick attempts.

Onodera told AFP he "didn't know what happened". "My run was good but I couldn't land my best trick, so it's frustrating," he said. Tanjung said his silver medal was "huge" after struggling to adapt to the stifling heat after days of rain in Hangzhou.

"It's outdoors and we only get an hour practice and then straight to skating," he said. "I can't believe I got the silver medal because everybody is good, everybody is going crazy at this park." — AFP

Cui, who started skateboarding three years ago, said her coaches had told her it was "OK if I fail doing the tricks I want to do". "I always wanted to win gold,"

Cui Chenxi became China's youngest gold medallist at the Asian Games in Hangzhou when she won the women's street skateboarding event on Wednesday. Cui, who is just over 1.5 metres (4ft 11in) tall, landed her first two individual tricks to race into the lead with a score of 242.62.

She failed to land any more but she had already done enough to claim gold ahead of compatriot Zeng Wenhui on 236.61 and Japan's Miyu Ito on 221.59. "My tactic was to be conservative on the first run to get some points on the scoreboard, then make a push for it on the second run," she said.

Fresh-faced skateboarders have been tearing it up at the Asian Games, with nine-year-old Mael Paris Alegado competing for the Philippines in Monday's women's park final. Margielyn Didal of the Philippines was the only skater over 20 in the women's street final, which also featured 11-year-old Vareeraya Sukasem and 12-year-old Natthiyabhorn Nawakitwong, both of Thailand.

Cui Chenxi

Sweet 13! China's Cui queen of the skateboard teens at Asian Games

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Cui Chenxi

Kuwait beat China in handball to advance at Asian Games



Kuwait beat host country China 27-24 to advance to the second round as Group A leaders during the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou on Wednesday.

Olympic champions Chopra, Barshim primed for glory

HANGZHOU: Olympic and world javelin champion Neeraj Chopra says mind and body are primed to defend his Asian Games title when the athletics starts in Hangzhou on Friday at the end of a gruelling season. The Indian spearheads a handful of top-class track and field stars competing across seven days at the "Big Lotus" Olympic stadium, which has a capacity of up to 80,000.

Among them is fellow Olympic gold medallist and three-time world high-jump champion Mutaz Essa Barshim. Chopra is expected to dominate the javelin after a strong season that saw him secure gold at the world championships at Budapest in August.

He also won the Doha and Lausanne legs of the Diamond League series, but suffered a rare setback this month when he was beaten by the Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlech in Eugene. "I still have one more competition, the Asian Games," he said after Eugene. "In big competitions, I think it's about mindset, in

big competitions we don't need to prepare ourselves. When we enter the stadium, our mind is ready and the body is also ready for the competition." He will face stiff opposition from Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, who took silver at the worlds behind his Indian rival on his comeback from elbow surgery and a knee injury. Fellow Indian Kishore Kumar Jena, who was fifth in Budapest, will also be vying for the medals.

A total of 48 gold are at stake in track and field in Hangzhou, with Qatar's Barshim an overwhelming favourite to win his third Asian Games title after successes in 2010 and 2014. He has motivation to get back on top of a podium after being shocked at the world championships by Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi, who denied him a fourth consecutive title. Barshim is the Asian record holder and also owns the second-highest jump in history at 2.43 metres.

His chief rival is set to be South Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok, the 2022 world championship silver medallist and 2018 Asian Games runner-up. Woo took out the Diamond League trophy in Eugene with a personal best of 2.35m, but Barshim wasn't there.

Hosts China have been a dominant force in track and field at the Asian Games and are bolstered by the likes of veteran Olympic women's shot putt champion Gong Lijiao and women's Olympic javelin gold medallist Liu Shiyang. — AFP