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Nowhere to go, Gazans stuck as ground offensive looms

Kuwait rejects forced displacement; Palestinians flee; Death toll rises



GAZA: Photo shows smoke plumes rising above buildings during a Zionist airstrike on the Gaza Strip on October 14, 2023. — AFP



KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti raises a banner during a gathering to express solidarity with Palestine in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

GAZA: Zionist entity warned Palestinians on Saturday to get out of the northern Gaza Strip before an expected large-scale ground offensive against Hamas, one week on from the deadliest attack in Zionist history. Troops, tanks and heavy weaponry were massed at the border in anticipation of strikes against leaders of the Islamist group.

On the Gazan side, health officials said more than 2,200 people had been killed - most of them civilians, as on the Zionist side - as concerns grew about the humanitarian situation in the be-

sieged enclave as food, fuel supplies and medicines ran low. Saudi Arabia called for an "immediate ceasefire", while the United States called on China to use its regional influence to broker urgent peace talks.

The military has been pounding the besieged territory with thousands of missiles since last Saturday's deadly dawn raid, which has been likened to the 9/11 attacks in the United States. One air strike killed Ali Qadi, described as "a company commander of the Hamas 'Nukhba' commando

Continued on Page 6

Family visas likely for Palestinian teachers

KUWAIT: The residency department in the Ministry of Interior has reportedly received instructions from Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, to begin the necessary procedures for allowing Palestinian teachers in Kuwait to bring their children from Gaza. While not confirmed, the initiative is intended to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people following the ongoing Zionist military operations in Gaza.

Sources said that the decision, if enacted, would allow family visas for Palestinian teachers only. The decision has reportedly been urged by the Ministry of Education, to help teachers perform their duties while being assured of their family's safety. "The procedures for family visitations will be temporary and not permanent," sources added. The sources indicated that family visas for expat workers from other countries will remain closed until the implementation of a new mechanism for issuing visas.



RAFAH: Palestinians wait at the Rafah gate hoping to cross into Egypt as attacks on the Gaza Strip continues on October 14, 2023. — AFP

Skygazers watch a rare celestial event

ALBUQUERQUE: Skygazers across the Americas turned their faces upwards Saturday for a rare celestial event: an annular solar eclipse. A crowd wearing protective eyewear gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one of many across the western United States to be watching as the Moon began passing between the Sun and Earth at its furthest point from our planet. Since it is so distant, it will not cover the Sun completely, creating a "ring of fire" effect.

In the course of just a few hours the most striking "path of the annularity" will cross a handful of major cities, including Albuquerque as well as Eugene, Oregon and San Antonio, Texas, with partial eclipse phases lasting an

hour or two before and after. At any given location, it will be visible from between 30 seconds and five minutes - but people are urged to take safety precautions and use solar viewing glasses, and never regular sunglasses, to preserve their vision.

"Do NOT look at the Sun through a camera lens, telescope, binoculars, or any other optical device while wearing eclipse glasses or using a hand-held solar viewer - the concentrated solar rays will burn through the filter and cause serious eye injury," NASA says. Next the eclipse will cross Mexico and Central America, then into South America through Colombia and northern Brazil before ending at sunset in the Atlantic Ocean. For those not lucky enough to be in the path of this special astronomical transit, NASA was live streaming the event

Continued on Page 6



ALBUQUERQUE: The 'ring of fire' effect caused during the annular eclipse of the Sun over Albuquerque, New Mexico, on October 14, 2023. — AFP

India PM confirms 2036 Olympics bid

MUMBAI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirmed Saturday that his country would bid to host the 2036 Summer Olympics and become just the fourth Asian nation to stage the Games. The world's most populous country is this weekend holding a session of the International Olympic Committee's executive board, which has already resolved to include cricket - India's most popular sport - at the 2028 Games in Los Angeles.

Modi made the bid announcement while formally opening the meeting after months of hints from members of his government, saying it was the "dream and aspiration" of India's 1.4 billion people. "India will leave

no stone unturned in our efforts to organize the 2036 Olympics," he said. Modi did not mention which city would apply to host the Olympics. But media reports have speculated that Ahmedabad, capital of his home state of Gujarat, was the most likely city to bid.

Ahmedabad is home to Narendra Modi Stadium, named for the prime minister and with 132,000 seats, the world's largest sporting venue by capacity. The formal announcement comes just two months after sports minister Anurag Thakur said India was now home to "top global infrastructure" that left it ready to stage the Olympics. "There should be no question about India's competence," The Hindu newspaper quoted Thakur as saying. India this year held the presidency of the G20 and was roundly praised for its smooth hosting of the world's most powerful leaders.

Modi said Saturday that the G20 summit's success was proof that the country was ready to put

on "mega global events". But India has struggled to stage large-scale sporting competitions in the past. New Delhi's hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2010 was marked by construction delays, sub-standard infrastructure and accusations of financial mismanagement and corruption. India is currently hosting the Cricket World Cup, and was criticized for a delay in announcing the tournament fixture until three months before it began.

The schedule was suddenly overhauled a few weeks after it was first published with some of the biggest matches rescheduled. Fans have meanwhile complained about online ticketing crashes, and matches not featuring the hosts have been sparsely attended. Modi's announcement came just moments after India beat Pakistan in the World Cup's most anticipated fixture. Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico and Poland are so far the only other countries committed to bidding for 2036. — AFP



Local

Nabat Poets Diwaniya: Rich literature heritage



The late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the late UAE president Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahyan.



Photo shows HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Nabat Poets' Diwaniya at Abu Dhabi Poetry Festival

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's Nabat Poets' Diwaniya, established in 1977, has a rich Kuwaiti literature heritage. The diwaniya aspires to present its Kuwaiti heritage during its participation in the Abu Dhabi Poetry Festival 2023. The festival started on October 12 and continues until October 15, under the patronage of Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, with the participation of poets, researchers, and media figures from different countries around the world. — KUNA

International agreement on Khor Abdullah 'must be respected,' Arab Parliament says

MP stresses the importance of maritime border demarcation

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament called on Saturday to respect international agreements pertaining to the Khor Abdullah issue between Kuwait and Iraq. This came in reaction to the Iraqi Federal Court annulling the agreement back on September 4. The call was made after unanimously voting in favor of a draft proposal submitted by parliament member and Kuwaiti National Assembly MP Khaled Al-Otaibi at the opening Arab Parliament's fourth session.

At the session, MP Al-Otaibi stressed the importance of respecting signed treaties between Kuwait and Iraq, which were internationally recognized. He affirmed that both countries must be eager to expand cooperation in all domains, avoiding any developments that might cause strife in relations. He reiterated Kuwait's respect for international resolutions, namely UNSC Resolution 833/1993 concerning the UN Iraq-Kuwait Boundary Demarcation Commission.

Al-Otaibi stressed the importance of completing the demarcation of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi maritime border beyond the border mark No. 162 according to

concerned international law. The Kuwaiti lawmaker said the Khor Abdullah agreement, an internationally recognized treaty, had attained constitutional and legal recognition and should be implemented in accordance with Article 102 of the UN Charter.

The article stated, "Every treaty and every international agreement entered into by any Member of the United Nations after the present Charter comes into force shall as soon as possible be registered with the Secretariat and published by it." "No party to any such treaty or international agreement which has not been registered in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article may invoke that treaty or agreement before any organ of the United Nations."

In another development, a number of Kuwaiti lawmakers affirmed on Saturday that actual and practical actions and steps were needed to support Palestinians, namely in their struggle against the oppressive Zionist occupation regime and its inhumane treatment of them. This came in statements to KUNA by Kuwaiti National Assembly MPs Khaled Al-Otaibi, Ahmad Lari, and Hamdan Al-

Azmi, who are in Cairo partaking in Arab Parliament meetings.

Kuwait will always stand against the occupation of Palestine, the chief and main cause for the Arab and Kuwaiti people, said MP Al-Otaibi on his part. Al-Otaibi revealed that Kuwait had proposed that the Arab Parliament meeting be held under the title "In support of Gaza" due to the war of extermination against the Palestinian people. Arab and Muslim nations should stand against the treatment of their Palestinian brethren, affirmed Al-Otaibi, who condemned nations standing in solidarity with the oppressive Zionist regime and its actions against innocent Palestinians.

Similarly, fellow Kuwaiti lawmaker MP Ahmad Lari said that the Kuwaiti leadership had and would continue to support the Palestinian people and their just cause regionally and internationally against the occupiers. Since the launch of "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" back on October 7, Arab Parliaments have made it clear that Palestine is an important issue for all Arabs, said Lari, who indicated that Kuwaiti lawmakers had issued a statement in support of Palestine and its



CAIRO: Kuwait lawmakers Khaled Al-Otaibi and MPs Hamdan Al-Azmi take part in Arab Parliament meetings in Cairo. — KUNA

people. Also speaking on his part, MP Al-Azmi said that the current operation against the Zionist occupiers was a natural reaction to decades of injustice against the Palestinian people.

He commended the resistance of the Palestinian people and, at the same

time, condemned the West's support of atrocities committed by the occupiers. Al-Azmi said that no peace would be achieved without returning what was rightfully owned by the Palestinian people in terms of their land and also Jerusalem. — KUNA

Kutayba Alghanim Design Award expands reach to celebrate Gulf creativity

KUWAIT: The second edition of the Kutayba Alghanim Design Award is set to return towards the end of 2023, building on the success of its first run, which concentrated on architectural design in Kuwait. This time, the competition is extending its reach to include submissions from all countries within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Talented designers are invited to take on the challenge of innovating and transforming fundamental elements of living spaces, specifically chairs and tables.

This strategic move is a clear demonstration of Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, and his enduring commitment to nurturing innovation and educational prospects in the region, as well as inspiring and empowering the next generation of Gulf talent.

The inaugural competition celebrated architectural innovation by inviting participants to rejuvenate an old water tower, constructed in 1966, located at one of the company's sites near Kuwait City.

This iconic symbol of modern-day Kuwait was the canvas for designs that seamlessly blended its historic significance with contemporary flair. Now, in partnership with Safat Home — an esteemed furniture brand under Alghanim Industries' umbrella — the competition is pivoting to furniture design, highlighting chairs and tables. Aspiring designers are tasked with producing designs that strike a balance between distinct aesthetics and functional utility, reinforcing the importance of inventive design.

Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Executive Chairman



Kutayba Y Alghanim

of Alghanim Industries, shared his thoughts on the competition, saying, "The GCC is entering a new phase of development, and design innovation is essential in shaping our path forward. Through this award, we aim to ignite discussions, inspire creativity, and cultivate a culture of innovation across the Gulf. We're inviting designers to push boundaries and let their dreams take flight.

More than a simple recognition of talent, this award is a platform for experimentation and creative exploration. We eagerly await the fresh perspectives that these talented designers will contribute to our community, helping to pave the way for a more imaginative, prosperous, and beautiful future." Participation in this competition is open to all GCC citizens — from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman. Ambitious designers can submit their designs in two distinct categories: chairs, including all types of seating such as sofas, and tables of various kinds, including dining and meeting tables.

The winning entries in each category will receive \$10,000 for first place and \$6,000 for second. For more information about the compe-

tion, registration and submission deadlines, interested individuals can visit www.competition.alghanim.com Alghanim Industries (Kutayba Alghanim Group) stands as one of the largest private-sector companies in the region, with a rich history. Operating across a diverse range of sectors, including retail, distribution, food and beverages, automotive, and more, the company has a strong presence in the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. Alghanim Industries continues to grow, partnering with leading global brands and launching successful in-house brands such as Xcite for retail electronics and Safat Home for furniture and home accessories.

Safat Home, an Alghanim Industries company, is a sponsor for this edition of the competition. Established in 2004, Safat Home rapidly grew to become a well-known name in the world of furniture and home accessories. As part of Alghanim Industries, Safat Home strives to enrich customers' experiences by providing a wide array of products catering to different tastes, enabling customers to craft unique and personalized living spaces.

Arab parents must help kids preserve linguistic identity

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Many Arab parents intentionally choose to speak English with their children as the primary language at home, instead of Arabic. This often happens due to multiple reasons especially since English language is the most used language across the globe. Thus, parents adopt English as the primary language to equip their children with communication skills and secure wider career opportunities. However, there are also concerns by those who believe that Arab children should be encouraged to preserve their Arabic identity through preserving Arabic language and heritage. Kuwait Times interviewed Sociologist Dr Mona Al-Enezi, and Social Relations Consultant, Khadija Badr Karam, who shared their thoughts on the topic.

Kuwait Times: What is your opinion on the growing trend of speaking with children in a foreign language inside the house among Arab families?

Al-Enezi: There is no doubt that parents play



Dr. Mona Al-Enezi



Khadija Badr Karam

a pivotal role in the linguistic development of the child, and subsequently the school and society. If the school and society speak in a foreign language, for example, English, then it is necessary to speak in English. However, if the language of the school and the society is Arabic, then there is no problem in using the foreign language at home to enhance it, while still preserving the native language, which is Arabic, as the case is in Kuwait.

Karam: English is an important language for communicating with others in several fields and countries. It is important to master it, but using it within the family has become annoying. We should hold on to our mother tongue which is the Arabic language with its vocabulary and also our Kuwaiti dialect with its beautiful words.

Kuwait Times: What are the pros and cons



that children may experience when speaking a foreign language from a young age?

Al-Enezi: It is a double-edged sword. Today, we live in a society dominated by a foreign influence in language and communication, due to the internet's openness and other factors. Therefore, children need to learn and master the English language, while still preserving and promoting the Arabic language in the Arab community, so they can have persuasive discourse in society, especially since Kuwait still uses Arabic as the first language.

Karam: There are many positives. From an academic perspective, it qualifies the child for bigger and wider areas of communication with

others who speak foreign languages. The foreign language becomes the language of communication between many nationalities whereas the negatives include not mastering the Arabic language. Many students have been observed to fail in Islamic education and the recitation of the holy Quran, which means they fail as Muslim individuals to master reading the Quran, which is in Arabic.

Kuwait Times: What are the common social challenges that can be faced when speaking a foreign language inside the house, and how can they be dealt with?

Al-Enezi: In Kuwait, the society still relies on Arabic as the mother tongue in interactions. Hence, those who do not speak Arabic face difficulties in communication and integration, as they are unable to express their ideas, leading to social isolation and social anxiety, and consequently affecting their self-confidence. The problem lies in relying on a language within the household as the primary language. Therefore, children need proper guidance from their parents. Foreign languages can be taught alongside Arabic, but not instead of Arabic.

Karam: When a child tries to communicate with others from their family and surroundings in Arabic, the language becomes rusty, and its vocabulary may be limited. This can lead to the challenge of being bullied. Moreover, some children may face difficulty in socializing with their community and extended family.

Local

Zain hosts informative mental health session for employees

Presented by mental health and wellbeing advocate Sheikha Majda Al-Sabah



Eaman Al Roudhan honors Sheikha Majda Al-Sabah for her contribution.



Al Roudhan with Sheikha Majda Al-Sabah and Zain employees.

KUWAIT: Continuing its series of informative talks for employees, Zain recently hosted a special session on mental health on the occasion of World Mental Health Day, celebrated around the globe on 10 October. The insightful talk was presented by philanthropist, entrepreneur, and advocate for mental health and wellbeing Sheikha Majda Jaber Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, and was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al Roudhan, the executive management team, and many Zain employees.

The session came under Zain's internal initiative for promoting mental health, entitled BE WELL, which encompasses the company's strategic goals for catering to its employees' mental wellbeing. Zain continuously enriches its direct relationship with its staff in and out of the workplace environment, catering to their most important needs by hosting similar gatherings that cover health-related priorities, including mental health.

During the session, which was held at the Zain Innovation Campus (ZINC), Sheikha Majda Al-Sabah stressed on the importance of maintaining mental health, while pointing out the best tips for creating the perfect balance between

one's personal and professional lives. Sheikha Majda openly and candidly spoke about her own personal journey and challenges with mental health, underlining the importance of destigmatizing this crucial topic.

Zain regularly hosts health-related sessions and programs to cater to its employees' wellbeing, giving them the chance to check up on their physical and mental health while at the office. Such activities include routine checkups for blood pressure and sugar levels, vaccinations, blood drives, and mental health initiatives and campaigns.

In 2021, Zain introduced a groundbreaking, first in the region mental wellness strategy named BE WELL. The inspired wellbeing program seeks to cultivate a holistic approach to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) and support Zain employees' mental wellbeing. The program features numerous approaches that help employees cater to their mental health, like direct access to a smartphone app for self-help, free therapy and counseling sessions, workshops and talks, and more. The different tools work towards fostering a mindful and proactive working environment for Zain employees.



From the session.



KUWAIT: People raise placards during a march to show solidarity with the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in Kuwait City on October 13, 2023. Thousands of protesters poured onto the streets of several Middle East capitals in support of Palestinians amid Zionist air strikes on Gaza. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait protesters denounce Zionist deadly aggression

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Hundreds of citizens and residents gathered at Al-Irada Square in Kuwait City on Friday, uniting in a powerful display of solidarity with the Palestinians to express unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their resilience against the Zionist occupation. In this poignant demonstration, voices from various backgrounds came together, echoing a shared commitment to peace, justice, and an end to the occupation.

During the standing in solidarity, Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Aiban made a resounding declaration, reaffirming Kuwait's unwavering stance on humanitarian and Arab issues. With strong conviction, he emphasized that Kuwait's commitment to these causes is indivisible, reflecting its dedication and support for human rights and Arab solidarity.

He added, "Kuwait's position does not accept neutrality on such issues," indicating that his presence at the sit-in is an extension and confirmation of his government's declared position. Aiban emphasized that the Kuwaiti populace embodies freedom and pride, asserting that the current moment, marked by a symbolic pause, carries profound emotions and values.

Several Members of Parliament made a notable presence at the solidarity event for Palestine. Among them, MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf articulated that this is not just about the Palestinian issue; it's a matter of concern for every Muslim. He also mentioned that there are calls from National Assembly representatives to convene a special session to demonstrate their support for the Palestinian cause.

MP Dawood Marafi conveyed their firm stance in the National Assembly against any private party that declares support for Zionists. He stressed the deep sorrow felt in Kuwait for the dire situation in Gaza and



noted that this massive gathering exemplified the genuine determination of Kuwaitis to support the Palestinian cause. Marafi vowed to persist until a free and independent Palestine is restored, adamantly opposing the displacement of the people of Gaza and asserting their rightful ownership of the land.

MP Badr Nashmi stated that what was taken by force can only be reclaimed through force. He issued a call to all Arab people not to lose hope, and he prayed for patience and steadfastness for the resistance brethren, ultimately hoping for the return of Palestine. Protests displayed banners condemning "the Zionist aggression

against Palestinians" and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, the safeguarding of Palestinian civilians, and the removal of the blockade on Gaza.

In their speeches, participants emphatically reiterated that Palestine has always been and will remain the core concern for Arabs and Muslims, emphasizing the severe campaign of annihilation imposed upon the Palestinian population by the occupying Zionist forces. They also underscored the urgency of extending support to the Palestinians and assisting them in their ongoing defense of their homeland against the oppressive usurping entity.



Kuwait lawmakers: Escalation in Gaza can't be 'tolerated'

CAIRO: Hamdan Al-Azmi, member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly and the Arab Parliament, affirmed on Friday that the "dangerous" escalation of the occupation forces against Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip cannot be "tolerated". This came in a statement made by Al-Azmi to KUNA after his participation in the AP legislative, legal, and human rights affairs committee.

He stressed that this is not the issue of Palestine alone but rather the issue of the Arab and Islamic countries. He noted that the Zionist occupation started the war as the occupying power, affirming that "the intervention of some major countries in the issue also requires the intervention of Arab and Islamic countries", and the provision of all support to Palestinian people to liberate their land and get legitimate rights.

Al-Azmi wondered what "people should expect from the siege and assault on about two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip." He added that "certainly, after many decades of occupation, these people will explode in the face of the occupier". In the context of the preparatory meetings for the Arab Parliament session on Saturday (tomorrow), Al-Azmi said that the committee discussed a number of proposals related to its work plan, which is based on four main points. The points include legislative activity, strengthening human rights mechanisms, and following up on the process of joint Arab action, in addition to parliamentary support mechanisms and external activity.

Urgent Arab action 'needed'

In another development, another Kuwaiti lawmaker has called for an urgent Arab action to bolster support for the Palestinian cause throughout the region. Speaking to KUNA after attending the foreign affairs and national security meeting of the Arab Parliament, Dr. Mohammad Al-Huwaila — a Kuwaiti National Assembly MP and Arab Parliament member — said that a proposal was forwarded to the next session of the Arab Parliament to title the meeting "solidarity with Palestine".

The opening meeting of the fourth session for the third legislative term of the Arab parliament on Saturday would focus chiefly on the occupation's violations against unarmed Palestinian civilians, said Al-Huwaila. This is a war of extermination condemned by international law as well as global and humanitarian accords, stressed the Kuwaiti lawmaker, who pointed out that the Arab Parliament's members would be coordinating with their countries to find means to provide necessities and medical aid to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

He noted that the current savage and barbaric assault of the occupation forces had led to the deaths and injuries of thousands, mostly the elderly, women, and children. The Kuwaiti official also highlighted his country's efforts to support Palestine, revealing that a charitable campaign, comprising 23 charities and government entities, was launched recently to provide their Palestinian brethren with support and relief aid. — KUNA



Hamdan Al-Azmi



Dr. Mohammad Al-Huwaila

KRCS continues to deliver humanitarian aid in Gaza

Charity collects \$10.5 million in donations for Palestinians



KRCS continues delivering humanitarian aid in Gaza Strip.



KUWAIT: A protester lifts a Palestinian flag during a rally calling for opening the ports of the besieged Gaza Strip, at the Al-Israa Square in Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in Brief

Number of old people increasing worldwide

KUWAIT: Head of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences Dr. Mohammad Al-Jarallah said the number of people aged 65 and above would double worldwide and reach 1.6 billion by 2050, according to statistics of the World Health Organization. Dr. Al-Jarallah said in a statement marking the International Day for Old Persons that the number of people capable of working at an old age, between 55 and 64, would increase from 723 million in 2021 to 1.075 million by 2050. He called for boosting health of the elderly and backing them up as an active force in the society, noting that countries of the world including Kuwait face some problems in coping with demographic changes namely the increasing number of the seniors who should not be viewed as a burden. — KUNA



Dr Mohammad Al-Jarallah

Retirement list submitted

KUWAIT: Officials of the Public Institute for Social Security (PIFSS) have submitted a list of about 130 employees for retirement to Finance Minister Fahd Al-Jarallah. They were selected because of their age limit and the number of years they have worked. This direction came at the request of the minister to list the names of those who met the conditions for retirement in government institutions. Minister Al-Jarallah had earlier issued a decision to refer 27 employees for retirement, while on October 5, 2023, he issued a ministerial decision regarding the retirement of 60 employees in the ministry who met the conditions for retirement.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) continued delivering humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip on Saturday to ease the suffering of Palestinians affected by the occupation force attacks. In a statement to KUNA, KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said that there is a severe shortage of humanitarian aid in Gaza as all crossings are closed, adding that the society's team in the strip will continue distributing aid despite the difficult conditions.

The team delivered thousands of meals and food baskets, said Al-Barjas,

noting that Kuwait is the first country to deliver aid to Palestinians. KRCS is currently coordinating with the Egyptian Red Crescent and Palestine Red Crescent Society to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip as soon as crossings are opened, she said. She said that Kuwait's philanthropists and the private sector are continuously donating and supporting the society's online campaign "Relief Palestine".

Donations for Palestinians
The Kuwait Society for Relief announced Friday that it would be

collecting \$10.5 million in donations to aid Palestinians. In statements to KUNA, Omar Thuwaini, the society official in charge of the donation campaign, said that the donations would be used to send medical, humanitarian, and relief aid to people affected by the ongoing military operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He added that the donation campaign aims to support the steadfastness of the Palestinian people.

Dangerous escalation
Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call Friday from Bahraini counterpart Dr Abdulatif Al-Zayani. They discussed the dangerous escalation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Gaza Strip and joint GCC action. They mulled means to mobilize international efforts to de-escalate the situation in the Palestinian territories and Gaza Strip and save the lives of innocent civilians. They also discussed efforts to allow the provision of humanitarian and relief aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

Child's custody: Fathers face uphill battle in Kuwait

By Ahmed Al-Sabeeh

KUWAIT: Determining custody arrangements for fathers can be particularly challenging when seeking a divorce in Kuwait. The legal framework has traditionally favored mothers, often resulting in fathers not securing full custody of their children. Consequently, fathers are required to engage in legal battles to obtain full custody, demonstrating their commitment to caring for their children with respect and kindness.

To convince the judge, fathers must provide concrete evidence of their capabilities as caregivers, while also highlighting any concerns about the mother's suitability. These concerns may include issues like infidelity or substance abuse as such behaviors do not align with the role of a nurturing mother for

their children. Kuwait Times spoke with Lawyer Sultan Al-Shemali to shed more light on this matter.

Kuwait Times: Did recent changes in custody laws impact the rights of fathers seeking custody?

Al-Shemali: Recent changes in Kuwaiti family law, including the establishment of a family court, have influenced custody arrangements as a whole.

KT: What are the key factors that courts consider when determining custody arrangements for fathers?

Al-Shemali: Factors such as religious sect, mental health, travel commitments, criminal records, and the child's best interests are considered in custody decisions.

KT: What steps can fathers take to demonstrate their capability as parents during a custody battle?

Al-Shemali: Fathers can prove their capability by showcasing their ability to provide proper care and a supportive environment for the child.

KT: How does the concept of the child's best interests guide custody decisions, and how can fathers align with this principle?

Al-Shemali: Custody decisions are guided by the child's best interests, which may involve assessing the father's capability to provide a safe and nurturing atmosphere.

In some cases, the parents do not want to prolong their claim of custody as it may have bad effects on



their psychological health and their children and to avoid that they pivot the court route and settle it officially in a lawyer's office where a contract is drawn up to settle their dispute and that contract has the stance of the court's verdict itself.

Talking about joint custody, he said it is a false belief since the idea of joint custody is demonstrated within certain countries such as the United States, therefore, it is not applied in Kuwait. On the other hand, such an idea can be mutually agreed outside of court with certain conditions. Custody law in Kuwait is derived from the sharia law and fathers seeking custody need to prove their fitness for custody and establish how mothers' custody can be harmful for the child's best interest.



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Kuwaiti Finance Minister Fahad Al-Jarallah meets with Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the International Monetary Fund Jihad Azour.

Kuwait participates in World Bank, IMF annual meetings

MARRAKESH: The plenary session of the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) kicked off Friday in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh with Kuwaiti participation. In a message directed to participants during the meeting, King Mohammed VI of Morocco called for considering the global finance system and working on improving it to be fairer and take into consideration the interests of all.

He indicated that economic, social, and political developments witnessed in recent years require "reforming institutions and rules governing the multilateral system," calling for taking into account the destinies of all countries. For his part, head of the annual meetings in 2023, Ukrainian Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko affirmed that there are pressing challenges that have impacts on global economies, including slow growth, high inflation, climate shocks, and food shortages.

He stressed the effects of these challenges on countries around the world, especially the low- and middle-income ones, which calls for diversifying funding sources to enable these countries to obtain the necessary funds to overcome the challenges. Meanwhile, World Bank Group President Ajay Banga said that the world is witnessing a state of "uncertainty", mainly in the economy, which is basically shown in a decline in growth, food insecurity, the

spread of poverty, and climate crises.

"The World Bank is working to reduce project review and approval times by one-third. I believe we can deliver quality and speed," he said. He elaborated that these challenges have exacerbated the state of inequality and weak economic growth, mainly in developing countries, as growth declined from 6 percent to 5 percent during the last two decades and may reach 4 percent.

IMF Director General Kristalina Georgieva said the world is facing risks and challenges that affect the most vulnerable groups in the world. She noted that inflation, a decline in growth, poverty, and climate change are factors that deepen the gap among countries. Kuwait is taking part in the meeting with a delegation headed by Minister of Finance Fahad Al-Jarallah.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti Finance Minister held several meetings on Friday on the sidelines of the annual meetings of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). He met with Jordanian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Zeina Toukan on bilateral cooperation in the field of promoting the role of the WB's executive office to serve member states, including 11 Arab ones.

He then held a meeting with the Secretary-General of the Omani Minister of Finance, Nasser Al-Jashmi, on several issues and economic and financial developments put on the agenda of WB and IMF meetings. The Kuwaiti minister also met with the Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the International Monetary Fund, Jihad Azour, and discussed means of promoting cooperation between Kuwait and the fund, especially in state-implemented projects. — KUNA



Blinken asks China to use its 'influence' for Mideast calm

Conservative parties sweep to power in New Zealand

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BAGHDAD: Protesters burn Zionist flags during a demonstration at Tahrir Square in Baghdad on October 13, 2023. — AFP

Thousands rally across Mideast in solidarity with Palestinians

Hezbollah says 'fully prepared' to join its ally Hamas in the war

BAGHDAD: Thousands of protesters poured onto the streets of several Middle East capitals Friday in support of Palestinians amid Zionist air strikes on Gaza in reprisal for a surprise Hamas attack.

"No to the occupation!" chanted demonstrators gathered in central Baghdad after leader Moqtada Sadr called for a protest "in support of Gaza" and against Zionist entity, an AFP journalist reported. "This rally is aimed at condemning what is happening in occupied Palestine, the bloodletting and the violation of rights," said Abu Kayan, an organizer of the protest.

The besieged Gaza Strip has been under heavy Zionist bombardment since Saturday when Hamas fighters stormed Zionist entity's southern border and killed more than 1,300 people. The Zionist entity strikes that followed have killed at least 1,799 people, also mostly civilians, in the Gaza Strip which has already been under a land, sea and air blockade for more than 15 years.

In Egypt, videos on social media showed hundreds of protesters near Cairo's Al-Azhar mosque chanting in

solidarity with Gaza. "Arab and Muslim countries have the duty and the responsibility to provide urgent humanitarian aid and help to the Palestinians of Gaza", the university of Al-Azhar, the highest institution in Sunni Islam, said in a statement.

Anti-Zionist entity protests were also held in Iran on Friday. In the capital Tehran, demonstrators waved Iranian, Palestinian, and Lebanese Hezbollah flags and held banners reading "Down with Zionist entity", an AFP journalist said.

Similar gatherings took place in other cities across Iran, where Zionist entity flags were burned. In Jordan, which has long had a peace treaty with neighboring Zionist entity, more than 20,000 people gathered in central Amman, near the Grand Hussein Mosque, following a call for protests from the Jordanian leftist and youth groups.

Masses of demonstrators filled the streets, waving Palestinian flags and chanting "the people want the liberation of Palestine". One demonstrator exclaimed "it is (Palestinians') right to defend their

land and people". Hundreds protested in other Jordanian cities. In Lebanon, supporters of Iran-backed Hezbollah rallied in the southern suburbs of Beirut in support of the Palestinians.

At the event, Hezbollah deputy chief Naim Qassem, standing in front of a banner depicting Palestinian fighters and the Al-Aqsa mosque, with a Palestinian scarf on his shoulders, said Hezbollah is "fully prepared" to join its ally Hamas in the war. He said "when the time comes for action, we will take it," referring to joining Hezbollah's ally Hamas in the war against Zionist entity.

In Algiers, around 1,000 people went into the street to show solidarity with Palestinians. In France, where President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday called on Zionist entity to deal a "strong" but "just" response to the Hamas attack, the government issued a ban on "pro-Palestinian demonstrations because they are likely to generate disturbances to public order."

Cries of "Free Palestine" rang out in New York on Friday, as thousands of protesters took to the streets to

denounce Zionist bombings in the Gaza Strip. Calling for an end to "Zionist occupation" and the "liberation" of the Palestinian territories, protesters took up multiple blocks in a city that serves as a crossroads for religions and nationalities spanning the world. The largely youthful protest — which drew demonstrators of all origins, some sporting Palestinian flags and keffiyehs — accused Zionist entity of "genocide" and called for the US to withdraw support for its Middle Eastern ally.

Thousands of people rallied Saturday in London and other UK cities for pro-Palestinian protests, amid police warnings that anyone showing support for the Hamas could face arrest. Attendees, who marched through the heart of the British capital as well as Manchester in northern England, Edinburgh in Scotland and other cities, were shadowed by a heavy police presence. In London, demonstrators massed near BBC News' headquarters before an afternoon rally near Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Downing Street office and residence. — AFP

Aid groups plead for Gaza safe zones amid Zionist threat

JERUSALEM: International aid groups and major powers have pleaded with Zionist entity to set up safe zones in Gaza where thousands struggled Saturday to get out of the north of the Palestinian territory, under threat of attack.

With thousands of Zionist entity troops massed around Gaza's borders, uncertainty over when Zionist entity could launch a ground operation in reprisal for deadly raids by Hamas has added to the turmoil in Gaza. "We fear an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe," said Ivan Karakashian of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Zionist entity on Friday warned 1.1 million people to evacuate northern Gaza. In response thousands continued on Saturday to pack buses, cars and donkey carts and even fled on foot to escape, while others have gathered around a border crossing into Egypt.

The Zionist entity military has designated two north-south routes in Gaza where it has promised safe passage for six hours a day. But military leaders have not said how long this will last. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said it had been given a "renewed deadline" to evacuate by 4 pm on Saturday, but that it would continue its work in northern Gaza in keeping with "its humanitarian mandate".

Gaza has already taken a battering from air raids and shelling since the Hamas assault on October 7 that killed over 1,300 people. At least 2,215 people have



RAFAH, Palestinian Territories: A child cries as Palestinians with foreign passports wait at the Rafah gate hoping to cross into Egypt as Zionist attacks on the Gaza Strip continues on October 14, 2023. — AFP

been killed in Gaza in the past week.

With power cut off, the Medecins du Monde medical aid group expects to gradually lose contact with its teams in Gaza, said Louise Nichet, a senior official in the group's Middle East department.

Many aid groups have already suspended operations and no supplies can now get through the Zionist entity siege. "Our partners are fleeing with their families," said Karakashian. The Norwegian group employs 53 people in Gaza. The British group Medical Aid for Palestine said its staff were still working but are "afraid".

The World Health Organization has said the seven hospitals in Gaza are on the verge of breakdown. "It is impossible to evacuate vulnerable hospital patients without endangering their lives," said the UN agency. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and several aid agencies have spoken out against Zionist entity's evacuation order. — AFP

Zionist strikes kill, hurt journalists in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon said on Saturday that Zionist entity was behind cross-border fire that killed a Reuters journalist and wounded six others near the border the previous day. Zionist entity's military said it was looking into the circumstances of the fatal strike Friday which also injured journalists from AFP, Reuters and Al Jazeera.

"We are very sorry for the journalist's death," military spokesman Richard Hecht told a briefing in reference to the Reuters video journalist killed, Issam Abdallah. On the question of who launched the strike, Hecht said that "we are looking into it". The Lebanese army said in a statement that "the Zionist entity enemy fired a rocket shell that hit a civilian car belonging to

a media team, leading to the death of Issam Abdallah".

Lebanon's foreign ministry also blamed Zionist entity and labeled the strike a "deliberate killing" and a "crime against freedom of speech and journalism". The group of journalists from different media, wearing press vests and helmets, was near the village of Alma Al-Shaab, close to the border with Zionist entity, when they came under "direct" fire, according to two eyewitnesses.

The border has been rocked by violence since Palestinian Islamist group Hamas killed 1,300 in its October 7 attack on Zionist entity, sparking retaliatory bombing of Gaza that has killed 1,900 there. Zionist entity has massed forces and tanks along the northern border with Lebanon, a country with which it remains technically at war, and where the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah has a heavy presence.

AFP photographer Christina Assi and AFP video journalist Dylan Collins were among the six journalists wounded. Collins said there had been no outgoing fire from their location prior to the strike launched from the Zionist entity side of the border. — AFP

France on top alert after school attack, Louvre evacuated

ARRAS, France: France was on high alert on Saturday, after an attacker stabbed a teacher to death in what the president called an act of "Islamist terror," with troops deployed and the Louvre museum evacuating visitors.

Friday's attack took place in the northeastern town of Arras, home to large Jewish and Muslim populations. A

man in his twenties killed French teacher Dominique Bernard and severely wounded three others at the school he used to attend. On Saturday, amid fears that the conflict between Zionist entity and Hamas could lead to violence in foreign capitals, France announced it would deploy up to 7,000 soldiers under the highest warning level, while the famous Louvre museum in Paris evacuated visitors and closed following a "security" threat.

Police arrested the suspected perpetrator of Friday's attack, Mohammed Moguchkov. He was among 10 people being held in custody on Saturday, a police source told AFP, including several members of his family. Authorities have suggested a probable link to the ongoing violence in the Middle East. — AFP

International

Blinken asks China to use its 'influence' for Mideast calm

Top US diplomat holds 'productive' telephone call with Chinese FM

ABU DHABI: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Saturday on China, a partner of Iran, to use its influence to push for calm in the Middle East.

The top US diplomat, who was visiting Saudi Arabia, had a "productive" one-hour telephone call with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said. "Our message was that he thinks it's in our shared interest to stop the conflict from spreading," Miller told reporters on Blinken's plane from Riyadh to Abu Dhabi.

"He thought it could be useful if China could use its influence," China has a warm relationship with Iran, whose clerical leadership supports both Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group ruling Gaza that carried out grisly attacks inside Zionist entity a week ago, and Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group that could open a second front against Zionist entity.

Wang for his part said that the United States should "play a constructive and responsible role, pushing the issue back on track for a political settlement as soon as possible," according to a readout published by the Chinese foreign ministry. "When dealing with international hot-spot issues, major countries must adhere to objectivity and fairness, maintain calmness and restraint, and

take the lead in abiding by international law," said Wang.

The Chinese foreign minister added that Beijing called for "the convening of an international peace meeting as soon as possible to promote the reaching of broad consensus." "The fundamental outlet for the Palestinian issue lies in implementing a 'two-state solution,'" said Wang.

China's official statements on the conflict have not specifically named Hamas in their condemnations of violence, leading to criticism from some Western officials who said they were too weak. The United States considers China to be its main global challenger but the two powers have been working to stabilize their relationship, with Blinken paying a rare visit to Beijing in June.

Miller said the Middle East was an example of areas where the two powers could work together. The phone call also included a discussion on China-US relations, which have been heavily strained in recent years by a range of thorny trade and geopolitical issues.

But Wang suggested there were some positive signs. "China and the United States have recently carried out a series of high-level contacts, and bilateral relations appear to have stopped sliding and to stabilize," said Wang. "(This) has been welcomed by the people of the two countries and the international community." — AFP



RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan (right) meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on October 14, 2023. — AFP

Migrant surge in US sparks anguish in Democratic cities

SAN DIEGO: Hundreds of migrants congregate by the huge wall marking the US-Mexico border in southern California, a tiny glimpse of the crisis unfolding in American cities as new arrivals strain resources to breaking point.

The dysfunction in the border city of San Diego is repeated on a larger scale in hubs like New York and Chicago — testing the patience of local Democratic leaders who say their own man in the White House is failing on a very pressing problem.

"The reality is that we don't have sufficient funds," Nora Vargas, a Democrat on San Diego County's Board of Supervisors, told AFP. "We've been trying to create a plan with the county, with the federal government and the state of California. And as we continue to plan, the numbers continue to increase."

"As a result, last week, we declared it a humanitarian crisis." Immigration has long been a contentious topic in the United States,

with Republican and Democratic politicians presenting differing visions on how to overhaul the country's broken system. A huge influx of arrivals this year — US media report a record 2.4 million migrant encounters at the southern border over the last 12 months — is testing the traditional Democratic stance of welcoming even those who come into the country without permission. In San Diego, migrants — most fleeing poverty and desperation in Latin America, along with others from Africa or Asia — are given wristbands that say when they crossed.

Local authorities try to process them within two days. But a massive backlog to see immigration judges, with waits of two years or more, means at this stage the migrants are merely shuttled through overcrowded processing centers and directed to interstate buses. The situation is repeated in communities along the southern US border. Republican-run Texas isn't wringing its hands. Governor Greg Abbott buses newly arrived migrants to cities like New York and Chicago, forcing their Democratic administrations to deal with a crisis that until recently was concentrated in border towns.

New York has absorbed more than 100,000 migrants in the last twelve months, and Mayor Eric Adams and state Govern-

nor Kathy Hochul have adopted a hardline stance. "We don't have capacity," Hochul told CNN last month. "We're at our limit, if you're going to leave your country, go somewhere else."

Adams last year declared a state of emergency in the city, where the crisis is estimated to cost taxpayers about \$5 billion.

He has been explicit about where the blame lies. "The president and the White House have failed this city," Adams said in April. The Democratic governor of Illinois, JB Pritzker, similarly pulled no punches against his own side after more than 15,000 migrants arrived in his state, with footage showing public buildings crowded by people who seemingly had nowhere else to sleep.

"The federal government's lack of intervention and coordination at the border has created an untenable situation for Illinois," he wrote to the White House. The criticism from fellow Democrats adds to the growing chorus of frustration in the United States over the soaring numbers of migrants crossing the southern border. Just a year out from a presidential election, incumbent Joe Biden is vulnerable to Republican attacks painting him as throwing the doors wide open to all as American families



SAN DIEGO: Migrants at the US-Mexico border wall on October 10, 2023 in San Diego, California. More than 200,000 migrants have crossed the San Diego sector of the US-Mexico border this year from January to August, the highest number in two decades. — AFP

struggle with rising grocery bills. Migrants are stuck in a system that is not fit for purpose and the current situation is no good for anyone, said Robert Vivar, a border missionary with the San Diego Episcopal Diocese. They cannot easily move forward into a new life in the United States, nor are they dealt with quickly if their application for asylum is unsuccessful. Neither Democrats

nor Republicans seem capable of tackling the issue that affects the whole country.

"The parties cannot agree on the humane immigration reform needed to address the needs not only of migrants seeking protection, but also the needs of employers here in the United States," Vivar said, noting that migrants can provide much-needed labor. — AFP

Accomplice appeals life sentence over France police killings

PARIS: A man who was sentenced to life imprisonment for complicity in the 2016 killing of a police couple at their home outside Paris in front of their child, has appealed the decision, his lawyers said Saturday.

Mohamed Lamine Aberouz, 30, was found guilty on Wednesday of complicity in the stabbings of Jean-Baptiste Salvaing and his partner Jessica Schneider by his friend Larossi Abballa on June 13,

2016. Abballa slit 36-year-old Schneider's throat in front of her three-year-old son and then stabbed 42-year-old Salvaing to death outside the house before being shot dead by a police response unit.

Aberouz has maintained his innocence since he was charged in 2017. "Our client was not present at the time of the events. We are not asking the court to tip over into fiction, but to judge the facts. In a state governed by the rule of law, we don't convict on the basis of hypotheses," one of his lawyers, Vincent Brengarth, told AFP. The appeal was lodged on Friday morning. Aberouz says he was at prayers the night of the attack, which took place at the height of a terror wave and marked the first time that police officers were traced to, and killed in their homes.

Abballa claimed the attack on behalf of the Islamic State group in a chilling 12-minute Face-

book Live video from the scene of the crime. The court ruled that Aberouz, whose DNA was found on the victims' laptop, was present in the couple's house at the time of the attack.

His lawyers claimed his DNA came from Abballa's car. Announcing the verdict, judge Christophe Petiteau said it was "unlikely" that Abballa acted alone. "The accused has declared before this court that he does not share the values of the (French) Republic, which raises doubts about his ability to reintegrate into society," Petiteau said. He added that Aberouz was "totally committed to the cause of the Islamic State".

During the trial, Aberouz condemned what he called "the monstrous act" and said he wanted to express his compassion to the victims' family. "It is inconceivable to me to be convicted for a crime I did

not commit. The name of the person who committed the irreparable act is Larossi Abballa," Aberouz said before the court retired to deliberate the verdict.

Police arrested Aberouz's older brother and took him into custody on Saturday after he made death threats against a lawyer representing the family of one of the victims.

Charaf-Din Aberouz, 37, was a close associate of Abballa and had initially been charged with terrorist criminal association in connection with the case, before his case was dismissed.

As a witness during the trial, he confirmed that he "knew Larossi Abballa well" and defended his brother's innocence. He had already been sentenced to five years' imprisonment for criminal conspiracy to prepare a terrorist act after attempting to join an al-Qaeda training camp in Pakistan in 2011. — AFP

Nowhere to go, Gazans stuck...

Continued from Page 1

force" involved in the unprecedented attack, the army said. "Localized" raids have also taken place, as troops encircle the Gaza Strip, said army spokesman Jonathan Conricus.

Some 1.1 million people — nearly half the population of 2.4 million — live in the north of Gaza, and aid agencies have said forcing them to move is an impossibility as the war rages. Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh accused Zionists on Saturday of committing "war crimes" in Gaza and blocking the supply of humanitarian aid. In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, posted on the militant group's website, he called cutting off of electricity, water and fuel supplies "barbaric". Zionist entity has vowed to destroy Hamas, which several Western governments, including the United States have proscribed as a terrorist organization, and likened to the Islamic State group. But it maintains that ordinary Palestinians are not their target, which is why they had requested them to leave.

Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has expressed Kuwait's unequivocal rejection of the Zionist occupation's call to forcibly displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. In statements to KUNA, Minister Sheikh Salem also deplored the occupation forces' continued military escalation, indiscriminate killing of Palestinian people, and destruction of their properties in violation of international humanitarian law.

Such a call would exacerbate the suffering of Palestinian people who already suffer from the siege and bombardment that claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, the minister said. He called on the international community and the UN Security Council to act swiftly to bring to a halt this dangerous escalation and war that does not differentiate between civilian and military targets. The minister called for stopping attacks on civilians, demanding all actors shoulder their political and humanitarian responsibilities in this regard. Zionist military spokesman Richard Hecht urged civilians in northern Gaza not to delay in getting out, with a "window" for safe passage between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. He did not say how many days the window would remain open.

AFP reporters on the outskirts of the southern city of Sderot saw troops hit northern Gaza with fresh air strikes on Saturday — the Jewish Sabbath — sending huge plumes of dense black smoke into the sky.

Gazans, who cannot leave the enclave as it is blockaded by both Zionist entity and Egypt, have packed what belongings they can into bags and suitcases, to trudge through the rubble-strewn streets. A stream of cars, trucks, three-wheeled vehicles and donkey-drawn carts joined the frantic mass movement south, all loaded with families and their belongings, mattresses, bedding and bags strapped onto the roofs of packed vehicles.

Roads in the 40-kilometre long territory were jammed. But putting distance between people and the bombings had not dispelled fear. "We wake up to the killing and death under the bombs," said Mohamed Abu Ali, who lives in Gaza. "We don't know where to go, where is safe. We have no food, water or electricity," he added. Aid agencies, including the UN and Red Cross, plus several foreign diplomats have voiced concern about the feasibility of the evacuation plan. Arab League chief Ahmed Abul Gheit said the order was a "forced transfer" that constitutes "a crime".

Hostages

According to the UN, more than 1,300 buildings in Gaza have been destroyed, while local hospitals have become overwhelmed with growing numbers of dead and injured. "What does the world want from us?" asked one Palestinian resident, Mohamed Khaled, 43. "I am a refugee in Gaza and they want to displace me yet again?" The looming ground invasion has also increased fears for the safety of the 150 hostages, including foreigners, that Zionists said Hamas seized during its deadly rampage. Hamas has threatened to kill the hostages one by one for every unannounced air strike. A total of 22 have already been killed in bombardments, the militant group said, without elaborating. Zionist army says it has contacted the families of 120 civilians being held so far. US President Joe Biden told US television on Friday that his administration was doing "everything" it could to locate 14 missing Americans. Egypt and Zionist entity have agreed to let US citizens leave the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, a US official accompanying Secretary of State Antony Blinken on a regional tour told reporters. But it was not immediately clear when the plan would be implemented. — Agencies

Iraq leader, Kuwait envoy discuss ties

BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid discussed on Saturday with Kuwaiti Ambassador Tareq Al-Faraj ways of developing bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries. During the meeting, the Iraqi president underlined the significance of promoting and bolstering Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations and broadening the scope of bilateral cooperation to serve both countries' common interests, the Iraqi Presidency said in a press release.

He also called for continued coordination, cooperation, and constructive dialogue between Iraq and Kuwait regarding issues of mutual interest. The Kuwaiti ambassador conveyed the greetings of the



BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador in Iraq Tareq Al-Faraj. — KUNA

Kuwaiti leadership to the Iraqi president, voicing appreciation for his interest in strengthening and developing bilateral relations. He stressed his country's keenness on continuing bilateral cooperation to serve the security and stability of both countries and the entire region. — KUNA

Skygazers watch a rare celestial...

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on nasa.gov/nasatv/ from 11:30am to 1:15 pm eastern time (1530 to 1715 GMT) from Albuquerque, as well as Carville, Texas and White Sands, New Mexico.

The event also serves as a dress rehearsal before a total eclipse set for April 2024. Both eclipses are going to be "absolutely breathtaking for science," said Madhulika Guhathakurta, a heliophysics program scientist. Solar eclipses have a noticeable effect on the upper atmosphere, such as the ionosphere, which is full of charged particles and responsible for reflecting and refracting radio waves.

"Although the atmospheric effects of solar eclipses have been studied for over 50 years, many unanswered questions remain," said Guhathakurta. To study these effects, NASA will launch three rockets from the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico to gather data on the electric and magnetic fields, electron density and temperature. A total eclipse took place in 2017 in the United States. After next April's total eclipse, there will not be another until 2044, while the next annular eclipse will be in 2046. — AFP



ALBUQUERQUE: Hot air balloon operators create a 'ring of fire' with their gondola burners during the annular solar eclipse at the 51st Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on October 14, 2023. — AFP

International

Conservative parties sweep to power in New Zealand

Hipkins concedes defeat of his center-left Labour party

WELLINGTON: New Zealanders resoundingly elected a new conservative government Saturday, with incumbent Prime Minister Chris Hipkins conceding his centre-left Labour party's six years in power were over.

Hipkins, who replaced charismatic two-term leader Jacinda Ardern in January, said he was "not in a position to form a government" and had already congratulated premier-in-waiting Christopher Luxon. "The result tonight is not one that any of us wanted, but I want you to be proud of what we achieved over the last six years," Hipkins told Labour supporters in Wellington.

The National Party and its coalition partner ACT were projected to win 61 seats with 97 percent of the vote tallied — enough to secure a majority in New Zealand's 120-seat parliament. "On current numbers, it looks like National and ACT will be in position to form the next government," Luxon added.

The former airline executive said New Zealanders had "reached for hope and voted for change".

The election campaign had been dominated by an increasingly difficult economic situation and a spike in the cost of living that has hit New Zealanders hard. "My pledge to you is that National will deliver for every New Zealander," Luxon said, promising to "build the economy and deliver tax relief".

The 53-year-old, who claims to sleep only five hours a night, completed a rapid political ascent.

Only four years ago he was working in the private sector. He spent seven years as chief executive of Air New Zealand, and was hailed a future leader upon entering politics in 2019. In their first 100 days in office, National plan a crackdown on youth offending, a ban on cellphones in schools, and a scrapping of the Labour government's planned fuel tax hikes.

"New Zealanders are going to wake up to not only a new day, but the promise of a new government and a new direction," Luxon told supporters in Auckland. "I cannot wait to get stuck in and get to work because New Zealand has chosen change and we will get this country back on track."

Both Luxon and Hipkins had tried to woo voters with promises to ease surging petrol prices, fix chronic housing shortages, and halt the skyrocketing prices of staple foods. "We will bring down the cost of living. We will restore law and order. We will deliver better health care and we will educate our children so that they can grow up to live the lives they dream of," Luxon added.

In the small town of Waikanae, about an hour's drive north of Wellington, butcher Terry McKee said the spiraling cost of living was the single-most important election issue. "Things are tight for everyone. Interest rates, fuel costs all drive costs up, but I don't know what another government is going to do," he told AFP. The Labour party, which secured a landslide victory under Ardern in 2020,



AUCKLAND, New Zealand: New Zealand's National Party leader Christopher Luxon interacts with his supporters after winning the 2023 New Zealand general election, during a party event in Auckland on October 14, 2023. — AFP

was on track to suffer one of its heaviest election defeats with forecasts pointing to 34 seats. "Following on from my good friend Jacinda, it was not

going to be an easy task," Hipkins admitted. "I did know when I took on this job that it was going to be an uphill battle." — AFP

Australian voters reject greater Indigenous rights

SYDNEY: Australians have roundly rejected greater rights for Indigenous citizens, scuppering plans to amend the country's 122-year-old constitution after a divisive and racially-tinged referendum campaign. With two-thirds of polling places reporting, 55 percent of voters had voted "no" to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the country's constitution for the first time.

The reforms would also have created a consultative body — a "Voice" to Parliament — to weigh in on laws that affect Indigenous communities and help address profound social and economic inequality.

Despite support from the country's centre-left government, the "yes" campaign had trailed in opinion polls for months, and a defeat was widely expected. Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles acknowledged the defeat early in the evening, telling public broadcaster ABC "Australians have not voted for a change to the constitution."

Despite pre-referendum polls pointing to a defeat, Indigenous Australians expressed anger and anguish that the white majority had rejected calls for a reckoning with the country's bloody colonial past.

"This is a difficult result, this is a very hard result," said Yes23 campaign director Dean Parkin.



CANBERRA, Australia: Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (left) and Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney attend a media conference at Parliament House in Canberra on October 14, 2023. — AFP

"We did everything we could and we will come back from this," he said. More than 230 years since the first British penal ships anchored in Sydney, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese proposed the reforms as a step towards racial reconciliation. But instead, it has sparked a deeply rancorous and racially-tinged debate that exposed a gulf between First Nations people and the white majority.

Polls have consistently shown that voters — most of whom are white — rank Indigenous issues far down their list of political priorities. In the days before the vote, media attention has focused as

much on events in the Middle East as the political debate at home.

The opposition campaign had deftly channeled fears about the role and effectiveness of the "Voice" assembly, encouraging people to vote "no" if they are uncertain. The debate was accompanied by reams of online misinformation: suggesting the "Voice" would lead to land seizures, a South African-style system of apartheid or was part of some United Nations plot.

Indigenous leader Thomas Mayo expressed fury at the conduct of the "No" campaign, which was backed by conservative opposition leader Peter Dutton. "They have lied to the Australian people. This dishonesty should not be forgotten in our democracy by the Australian people," he said.

"There should be repercussions for that sort of behavior in our democracy. They should not get away with this."

Dee Duchesne, 60, a volunteer for the "no" campaign, said she was "fighting to keep an extra layer of bureaucracy out of our constitution". She said she had been called racist while handing out leaflets near a Sydney polling station during early voting. "I'm not," she said. Voting is compulsory for Australia's 17.6 million voters.

The referendum could only pass with support from a majority of voters nationally and a majority of voters in at least four of the country's six states. It appeared to garner neither. The ballot paper asks: "A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognize the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?" — AFP

Putin heads to China this week

BEIJING: Russian President Vladimir Putin heads to China this week to meet his "dear friend" Xi Jinping, forging even closer ties in a key strategic relationship in which experts say Moscow is increasingly the junior partner. Beijing is hosting representatives of 130 countries on October 17-18 to mark a decade of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — a key geopolitical project of President Xi to extend China's global reach.

But all eyes will be on Putin, who last month told Beijing's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Saint Petersburg he had "gladly accepted" Xi's invitation to visit China for the BRI talking shop.

The Russian leader's strategic dependence on China has only grown since his invasion of neighboring Ukraine thrust his country into international isolation. Putin has hardly ventured beyond his country's borders since the war, with this week's trip the first to a major global power.

This year, trade between the two powers has soared to levels not seen since the beginning of Moscow's war in Ukraine, with Chinese imports of Russian oil offering Moscow a critical lifeline as international sanctions bite. Bilateral trade reached a record \$190 billion last year, according to Chinese customs data, and the two sides have pledged to reach \$200 billion this year.

China has refused to condemn the war in an effort to position itself as a neutral party, while at the same time offering Moscow a vital diplomatic and financial lifeline. "Beijing has maintained a posture of 'pro-Russia neutrality' throughout the invasion, providing critical diplomatic, economic, and non-lethal military assistance to Moscow," Joseph Webster, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center, told AFP.

At the heart of the deepening partnership is the relationship between Xi and Putin, who have described each other as "dear friends".

But their alliance is also forged by a symbiotic necessity, each seeing the other as a necessary bulwark in their shared struggle against Western dominance. When Xi made a state visit to Moscow in March, Putin hailed the "truly unlimited possibilities" their countries' partnership offered.

In May, the Chinese leader told Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin that Beijing and Moscow would continue to offer each other "firm support on issues concerning each other's core interests". After he lands in Beijing this week, Putin will be looking to match those lofty words with hard cash and firmer support for his war in Ukraine, experts said. "Moscow will try to further deepen cooperation with Beijing and elicit more support from China, including lethal military aid, as it has hopes that Western support for Ukraine may be gradually faltering," Bjorn Alexander Duben, an assistant professor at China's Jilin University, said.

China has so far offered only "non-lethal" support to Moscow, but experts said Beijing could change tack should Russia's situation worsen. "China doesn't want to see a significantly weakened Russia, and it might step up its efforts if it comes to realize that Moscow might lose," Alicia Bachulska, a policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told AFP. "Putin's regime collapse and related chaos are seen as a serious security threat," she added. "Beijing might be willing to increase its support for Russia to prevent such a scenario."

An open rebellion against Moscow by private mercenary group Wagner in June was swiftly put down, but not before raising fears in Beijing that the stability of its strategic partner could be waning, analysts said. Russia's perceived fragility is already offering Beijing leverage in the partnership, they added.

"The Chinese are very difficult negotiators," Russian political scientist Konstantin Kalachev told AFP, adding he expected "no further breakthroughs" on contentious issues including a long-awaited gas pipeline. "China's dominance in the relationship has massively increased," Duben said. "Its continued economic engagement with China is gradually turning into a relationship of direct dependence — raising the question whether Russia is steering towards a client relationship with Beijing." — AFP

Two dead as floods hit central Vietnam

HANOI: Two people died after being swept away in floodwaters in central Vietnam, state media reported Saturday. Almost 500 houses were inundated with water in recent days, according to Vietnam's disaster management authority.

The coastal city of Da Nang has been hit by heavy rain, as have areas from Ha Tinh to Quang Nam provinces since Tuesday. A 61-year-old man and a 13-year-old boy drowned in the floods, according to state media website VnExpress.

Around 5,000 people were evacuated from homes in Da Nang on Friday night and Saturday morning, it said. "The floodwater rose to my thighs and all of my family had to move upstairs, before the rescuers came and evacuated us," city resident Dinh Thi Tu Uyen told VnExpress.

In Hue city on Friday, roads flooded by the Perfume River, with water reaching nearly chest-high levels in some areas. Last weekend three people died in flash floods and landslides in northern Vietnam. Heavy rain is forecast to continue across the middle of the Southeast Asian nation in coming days.

Vietnam is frequently lashed by harsh weather in the rainy season between June and November.

Natural disasters including floods and landslides have claimed around 100 lives in the country since the beginning of the year, according to the country's General Statistics Office. Scientists have warned extreme weather events globally are becoming more intense and frequent due to climate change. — AFP



HUE, Vietnam: This photo taken on October 13, 2023 shows a man walking through a flooded area of Hue city in central Vietnam. Two people died after being swept away in floodwaters in central Vietnam, state media reported October 14. — AFP



KABUL: At least seven people were killed and 17 others injured in a suicide blast targeting a mosque in northern Afghanistan on Friday, Anadolu Agency reported citing the local media.

Seven killed in IS suicide attack on Afghan mosque

KABUL: At least seven people were killed and 15 more wounded when an Islamic State suicide bomber attacked a minority Shiite mosque in northern Afghanistan on Friday, the Taliban government said. The number of bomb blasts and suicide attacks has reduced dramatically since the Taliban ended their insurgency after seizing power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government.

However, a number of armed groups — including the regional chapter of the Islamic State (IS) organization — remain a threat. The blast rang out as Shiite worshippers gathered for Friday prayers at the Imam Zaman mosque in Pol-i-Khomri, the capital of Baghlan province. "As a result of a suicide attack... seven Shiite compatriots died, and 15 others were injured", provincial information and media chief Mustafa Asadullah Hashimi said in a statement. He added that law enforcement agents have been dispatched to the scene "to investigate how this heartbreaking incident happened".

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. An IS fighter "reached the centre of the gathering... and then blew up his explosive belt", said a statement from the jihadists' Amaq news agency. A source at Baghlan Provincial Hospital — who asked

to remain anonymous — put the tally higher, saying 19 bodies and 40 wounded patients had been brought to the facility so far. "Some of the dead and wounded were taken to other private hospitals as well," he told AFP.

Local resident Abdul Hamid said he heard a "terrible sound" as the bomb detonated. "After the explosion, a large number of martyrs and injured people were transferred to the hospital," he said. "The situation is not good at all." Another local said security forces were ushering people away from the area.

One resident who feared his father and brother were in the blast zone was struggling to find out their fate. "The situation around the hospital is very bad. Everyone is trying to find their family members, but no one is allowed to go inside the hospital," he told AFP, also speaking anonymously.

The regional chapter of IS has a history of targeting Shiites they consider heretics. The Taliban and IS share an austere Sunni ideology, however, Kabul's new rulers have pledged to protect ethnic and religious minorities. IS is also crusading to establish a global "caliphate" — Islamic empire — instead of the Taliban's more modest goal of ruling an independent Afghanistan with formal ties to other countries. Since the Taliban returned to government, IS has staged attacks on diplomatic missions in Kabul, and ministry buildings, as well as assassinated two provincial governors. They are also blamed for the September 2022 bombing of a study hall in a minority Shiite neighborhood of the capital, killing at least 53 people — including 46 girls and young women — according to the United Nations. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2023

Boursa Kuwait holds 'Financial Asset Managers Day' in Dubai

The event organized in collaboration with HSBC

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait organized a "Financial Asset Managers Day" on Oct 11, 2023 in collaboration with HSBC, the British-based multinational investment bank and one of the largest investment banks in Europe. Held at the bank's headquarters in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, the initiative brought together representatives from eight licensed Kuwaiti investment companies with the Markets and Securities Services Desk at HSBC (HSBC MSS).

The Day opened with keynote speeches from the bank's senior management to the Kuwaiti investment companies, highlighting the latest trends and developments in the GCC and Middle East's capital markets as well as showcasing the bank's strategic vision and objectives in dealing with those trends. The presentations also delved into HSBC's role to meet the requirements of international investors looking for



opportunities in GCC markets. Additionally, one-on-one meetings provided a platform for in-depth discussions on areas of interest, business opportunities, and potential collaborations.

HSBC handpicked eight investment companies

using specific criteria, choosing the Kuwait Investment Company, Wafra Investment Company, Kuwait Financial Center (Markaz), the National Investment Company, KFH Capital, KAMCO Invest, Arzan Financial Group and NBK Capital. At the event, Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector, Noura Al-Abdulkareem, said, "We are pleased to collaborate with HSBC to organize the Financial Asset Managers Day initiative, which will facilitate cooperation and knowledge transfer between a world-renowned financial institution and Kuwaiti investment companies. Boursa Kuwait is committed to strengthening its partnerships and avenues of collaboration to meet the needs of investors in the Kuwaiti capital market. I would like to thank HSBC and the participating Kuwaiti companies for helping to make this event a success."

The Financial Asset Managers Day initiative

aims to empower Kuwaiti investment companies to gain expertise and knowledge and utilize new products and services from world-renowned investment banks. Through this initiative, Boursa Kuwait also seeks to explore new opportunities for collaboration to contribute to the development of the Kuwaiti capital market.

Organizing these initiatives forms part of Boursa Kuwait's efforts to positively impact the capital market apparatus as part of its corporate sustainability strategy. The exchange launched several initiatives with investment institutions from around the world to develop the Kuwaiti capital market and highlight the opportunities it offers to the international investment community. The bourse is steadfast in its dedication to develop a more sustainable, brighter future for the Kuwaiti capital market and its participants.



MARRAKESH: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (center) attends the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group (WBG), in Marrakesh on October 13, 2023.— AFP

Africa hears pledges but little action at IMF-World Bank talks

MARRAKESH: Pummeled by debt, poverty and natural disasters, African nations heard many pledges of support but saw little action at the first IMF-World Bank talks to be held on their soil since 1973. The myriad troubles facing the continent were front and centre at the week-long talks in Marrakesh, Morocco, which began Monday and end Sunday.

The managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, said from day one that holding the meetings in Africa was "symbolically and substantively very important." A prosperous world economy in the 21st century requires a prosperous Africa," she said. The IMF was moving towards giving sub-Saharan Africa a third seat on its executive board.

The move, which will be effective next year, does not increase Africa's voting power within the international lender, whose main shareholders are the United States, China, Japan and western European powers. For some African officials, a good start would be erasing the mountain of debt that is forcing many countries to spend much of their revenue on paying back interest.

Small steps in climate finance

MARRAKESH: The IMF and World Bank have been holding their first annual meetings in Africa in 50 years under pressure to reform a system too outdated to properly help poor nations battered by the effects of climate change.

The heads of the IMF and World Bank outlined their efforts to refocus on climate in Marrakesh, Morocco, but change is not coming fast enough for activists and officials who fear the planet is running out of time. The 78-year-old system is "outdated, dysfunctional and unjust," said Kenyan President William Ruto, the heads of the African Union Commission and African Development Bank, and the chief executive of the Global Center on Adaptation said in a New York Times essay on Sunday.

In Marrakesh, hundreds of people marched on Thursday holding signs saying "make polluters pay". Others held a banner in front of the venue that read "end fossil finance." Campaigners even bought space on street billboards — one featured an image of new World Bank President Ajay Banga that also urged him to "be champion for people and planet." Banga has vowed to make climate a priority since he took over in June from David Malpass, a former US Treasury official who stepped down early from his five-year term following questions about his position on global warming. In his first major speech since taking office, Banga said Friday that the World Bank has adopted a new mission

The economy minister of Ivory Coast, Adama Coulibaly, who heads the G24 group of developing countries, said most of the debt is owed to multilateral development banks and the IMF.

"We are warning against a debt crisis that could stifle durable and inclusive growth," Coulibaly said.

More than 20 African countries are either already or on the edge of debt distress. In some countries, more than 40 percent of the state budget goes to servicing the debt — an unsustainable level in countries that need to maintain basic public services such as water and electricity. But negotiations to restructure debts have become more complicated over the years as new creditors such as China, Saudi Arabia and Brazil have emerged, in addition to private lenders. Now countries must negotiate terms with China and the Paris Club of creditors, which mostly comprises Western nations with very different policies as Beijing.

Zambia debt crisis

One example is Zambia, which defaulted on \$18.6 billion in foreign debt during the pandemic in 2020. The country's debt totalled \$32.8 billion at the end of 2022. For more than two years, the country has been negotiating with creditors led by China — its biggest lender — and France on \$6.3 billion of loans.

An agreement in principle was announced in June, but it has yet to be signed. On Thursday, Georgieva mistakenly announced that a memorandum of understanding was signed to seal the deal. An IMF spokes-

"to create a world free of poverty on a livable planet." He outlined ways to encourage countries to tackle climate change. "Uruguay became the first country to take advantage of reduced interest rates as a direct result of meeting climate performance targets," Banga said.

"We're investigating if we can reduce interest rates (of countries) to incentivize exiting from coal as part of energy transitions," he said. The global lender has also taken measures that could increase its funding capacity by \$150 billion over the next decade.

But Banga has warned that the bank would need

person later clarified that the deal was "nearly finalized" and the signing was "expected soon," without offering more detail. Zambia's debt is preventing the country from spending its budget on programs that could drive growth. Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane said in Marrakesh that 90 percent of his country's budget goes to paying public servants and servicing the debt.

The government has pushed reform to "limit the ability of an administration to go reckless on borrowing, because it is embarrassment for us," he said.

The World Bank said earlier this month that growth in sub-Saharan Africa has stalled since 2015 in per capita terms. The region is projected to contract in per capita terms over the 2021-2025 period, it said, "thus potentially marking a lost decade of growth." While they wait for debt relief, African countries complain that the West has been quick to provide huge financial assistance to Ukraine following Russia's invasion. The World Bank has provided nearly \$20 billion to Kyiv since the start of the war in late February 2022. The IMF has signed a \$15.6 billion aid program with the Ukrainian government in March as part of a broader, \$115 billion deal that includes the G7 and the European Union.

"Everybody agrees that it is important to help Ukraine financially," an African official told AFP in Marrakesh. "But in some countries there is a feeling that the urgency is just as important in their countries," the official said. "But it's not taken into account in the same way." — AFP

much more to help nations combat a "perfect storm" of challenges that include a climate crisis, a slow economic recovery, food insecurity and conflict.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire backed a "step-by-step approach" which should begin by assessing the needs of the World Bank and then raising a debt instrument known as hybrid capital from shareholders. The third step would be a capital increase at the World Bank that would not take place before 2025 at the earliest, Le Maire said.

"We are still at the observation round on the glob-

Zambia agrees debt deal with foreign creditors

MARRAKESH: Zambia has agreed a long-sought debt deal with its foreign lenders, the country's finance ministry said on Saturday at an IMF-World Bank annual meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco. The move will provide financial relief to the country, which in 2020 became the first in Africa to default after the COVID pandemic. "The Ministry of Finance...is pleased to announce that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been agreed with its Official Creditor Committee (OCC) on the comprehensive debt treatment," the ministry said.

"Each official creditor will now begin their internal process to sign the MoU."

Zambia had reached an agreement in principle with its creditors, which include China and Western nations, on \$6.3 billion of its debt in June, but the deal had yet to be finalized.

Earlier this week, the International Monetary Fund said the deal was expected to be signed soon, after the institution's chief prematurely announced it had been signed. "The next step is to secure a comparable agreement with our private creditors," Zambian Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane said.

"Our government committed to resolve the mounting debt suffocating our economy and we are proud of the immense progress we have made. Once completed, debt restructuring will free up resources vital for this government to invest in our development agenda." Concerns over debt in low-income nations have been at the forefront of talks of the IMF-World Bank meetings in Marrakesh, the first to be held in Africa since 1973.

Central banks worldwide have raised interest rates in efforts to tame inflation, which rose after COVID restrictions were lifted and jumped higher after Russia invaded Ukraine. Zambia, whose total debt amounted to \$32.8 billion at the end of 2022, defaulted on its \$18.6 billion foreign debt in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



MARRAKESH: Participants attend the 2023 annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group (WBG), in Marrakesh on October 13, 2023. -- AFP

al financial reform that is needed for sustainable development," said Oscar Soria, campaign director at non-profit group Avaaz. Friederike Roeder, a senior director at NGO Global Citizen, said reforms were "not moving fast enough." "We see concrete progress, and that's good, but there needs to be much more ambition," she said. Earlier this week, Banga was confronted by members of NGOs about the bank's continuing investments in fossil fuel projects.

"There is a real dichotomy between what the World Bank says it does and what it really does on the ground," said Rebecca Thissen, global lead on multilateral processes at Climate Action Network. Banga said Tuesday that the bank has dramatically reduced its funding of fossil fuel projects since 2019, with only \$170 million in direct funds going to natural gas projects last year out of \$120 billion it committed. The lender, Banga added, has tripled its renewable energy investments over the past decade. But German environmental group Urgewald has estimated that \$3.7 billion in World Bank trade finance ended up going into oil and gas last year.

The essay co-written by Ruto said the World Bank and IMF "now recognize that climate change is a threat to economic and financial stability, and they are changing their lending policies in response."

"But much more needs to be done — and we are running out of time to do so." The V20 group of 68 nations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change travelled to Marrakesh to press for reforms and for them to get a seat at the IMF. "Recognition of the V20 as an official IMF Group is more than just having a seat at the table and goes beyond giving a voice to the vulnerable," said Ghanaian Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta, who chairs the V20. — AFP



MARRAKECH: A group photo during the joint reception ceremony of Kuwaiti banks at Marrakech.



Salah Al-Fulaj, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq and CEO of the Group of foreign branches and companies.

NBK delegation participates in IMF and World Bank Group meetings

Delegation holds bilateral meetings with international officials at Marrakech

KUWAIT: The official delegation representing National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) concluded its participation in the annual events and meetings organized by the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group. These gatherings are taking place in Marrakech, Morocco, from October 9 -15. NBK delegation was headed by Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO, Salah Al-Fulaj, CEO of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, NBK-Kuwait Deputy CEO and Omar Bouhadiba, CEO, International Banking Group at NBK Group.

12 that La-Mamounia Hotel. The event was attended by numerous notable figures, including Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi, Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Fahad Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah, Minister of Finance, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Morocco Abdullahif Al-Yahya.

It also attracted a significant gathering of Kuwaiti government officials, senior bankers, investors, and influential global financial policy makers.

The event featured interactions between bankers from Kuwait and their counterparts from Arab and foreign regions, facilitating discussions on the most recent financial and banking advancements. These meetings created opportunities for knowledge exchange and the exploration of potential collaborations in the fields of finance and investment. Moreover, NBK's delegation took part in a reception organized in Marrakech by banks from Qatar, the KSA, and the UAE.

One of the significant highlights of this year's meetings for the official bank delegation was their participation in a symposium organized by the G30, held concurrently with the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank Group. Every year, central bank governors from around the world convene with industry leaders and academic experts at a symposium focused on addressing the paramount regulatory and financial challenges that dominate the forefront of global central banking discussions.

The bank's delegation also took part in meetings organized by the Institute of International Finance (IIF), where a range of topics were discussed. These discussions covered global challenges, including tightening monetary policies, financial markets' volatility, global geopolitical tensions, and strategies aimed at bolstering the resilience of the banking industry while fostering sustainable and broadly inclusive economic growth.

The IMF and the World Bank Group Annual Meetings brought together central bankers, ministers of finance and development, parliamentarians, private sector executives, civil society, and academics to discuss issues of global concern, including the world economic outlook, global financial stability, poverty eradication, inclusive economic development, and the effectiveness of international aid. These meetings encompass a wide array of activities, including seminars, regional briefings, press conferences, and numerous other events dedicated to addressing topics related to the global economy, international development, and the global financial system.



National Bank of Kuwait – Kuwait CEO Salah Al-Fulaj, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Morocco Abdul Latif Al-Yahya and Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the sidelines of the IMF meetings.

The 2023 Annual Meetings also covered a range of key topics. These discussions revolved around the strategies for establishing economic resilience in the face of a weak global economy and heightened uncertainty. Policymakers explored ways to build a more resilient future by reinforcing social safety nets to safeguard the most vulnerable segments of society, enhancing governance and accountability, strengthening policy frameworks, and addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

The Annual Meetings feature several significant committees, with the most notable ones being the Development Committee, the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC), the Group of Ten, the Group of Twenty-Four, and the Group of Thirty. The IMFC meeting, in particular, is slated to tackle a range of critical issues. These include evaluating the current state and potential future trends in the global economy's performance, as well as examining developments in international financial markets and the types of risks that could impact these performance trends. Moreover, discussions within this committee will focus on formulating key policies aimed at mitigating the consequences of such risks. During its Annual Meetings, the International Monetary Fund conducted a comprehensive assessment of the global economic outlook. This review encompassed the insights IMF's experts regarding trends in the global economic performance, expected risks, and the prospects of the world economy.

On the sidelines of the IMF annual meetings, Global Finance announced the annual award winners of the World Best Banks - 2023. In this prestigious list, National Bank of Kuwait received the award of the Best Bank in Kuwait-2023. Global Finance emphasized that this year's Best Bank Awards recognize the financial institutions that offer the broadest range of services as well as the reliability required for long-term financial relationships. Global Finance selected NBK as the best bank in Kuwait 2023 based on an objective criteria, encompassing factors such as growth in assets, profitability, geographical reach, strategic relationships, new business development, and product innovation.



Isam Al-Sager during an interview with Al-Arabiya on the sidelines of the IMF meetings.

The delegation participated in the Annual Meetings and took part in discussing key economic and financial challenges in addition to various topics focused on investing in education, accelerating climate finance, promoting inclusive growth and responding to the food & fuel crises.

On the sidelines of the IMF Meetings, NBK's delegation conducted numerous bilateral meetings with high-ranking international officials. These discussions focused on addressing the most significant challenges in the global banking and financial industry. Additionally, the bank took part in Kuwait Banking Association Evening Reception on October

US Fed on track for a 'soft landing'

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve is on track to achieve the rare feat of lowering inflation without causing a damaging recession, a senior central bank official said Friday. The Fed recently slowed the pace of its interest rate hikes after lifting rates to a 22-year high, citing progress made in the inflation fight. Policymakers have voiced growing optimism in recent weeks that the Fed can pull off a so-called "soft landing" — lowering inflation without causing a recession — given the underlying strength of the US economy and the jobs market.

On Friday, another member of the Fed's rate-setting committee said the central bank is on track to do so. "I believe that a resolute, but patient, stance of monetary policy will allow us to achieve the soft landing that we all wish for our economy," Philadelphia Fed President Patrick Harker told a conference in Delaware. At its most recent meeting in September, the Federal Open Market Committee indicated it expects one more hike will be needed this year. But a number of policymakers have indicated since then that the Fed may have done enough, and should now change its focus from how high to lift rates, to how long to hold them for. Futures traders, meanwhile, are assigning probability of close to 70 percent that the Fed will hold rates steady into next year, according to data from CME Group.

"So far economic and financial conditions are evolving as I expected, if not perhaps even a tad better," Harker said on Friday. He reiterated his belief that, if data trends continue, officials will have reached the point where they can hold rates steady. "I am more and more confident that not only is monetary policy currently working, but it will continue to work," he said. "My expectation is that rates will need to stay high for a while," he added. Harker noted underlying strength in the economy, which is expected to continue growing robustly in the third quarter. — AFP

Biden announces 'hydrogen hubs' in push for 2024

PHILADELPHIA: President Joe Biden announced new "hydrogen hubs" across the United States on Friday as part of efforts to boost the economy with green energy ahead of the 2024 election. "I'm here to announce one of the largest advanced manufacturing investments in the history of this nation - \$7 billion in federal investments is going to attract \$40 billion in private investment in clean hydrogen power," Biden said.



PHILADELPHIA: US President Joe Biden is reflected in the sunglasses of an attendee as he speaks about his Bidenomics agenda at Tioga Marine Terminal in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 13, 2023. — AFP

The 80-year-old Democrat traveled to Philadelphia to unveil the regions that won a bidding war for billions of dollars in funding to make the clean fuel, including a number in electoral battleground states.

The aim of the hubs is to produce around three million metric tons of clean hydrogen a year, amounting to one third of the US production goal for 2030, and reduce emissions. "Taken together, the emission reductions from these hydrogen hubs will be the equivalent of taking 5.5 million gas powered

vehicles off the road," Biden said. Biden, who is neck and neck with his likely rival next year, Republican Donald Trump, has made green energy a key part of his "Bidenomics" plan to revive US industry and create jobs. Hydrogen power is a key component of his goal to combat the climate crisis and get the United States to "net zero" emissions from pollutants no later than 2050, he said.

The huge funding boost will go to large-scale hydrogen production, the pipelines to transport it, and help industries and businesses adapt to using the fuel. The hubs are to be in California; Texas; the US east coast; the Midwest; the Pacific Northwest; the Appalachian mountain region in the northeast; the northern states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota. Two of the states involved - Pennsylvania in the eastern region and Michigan in the Midwest - were crucial swing states in the 2020 election when Biden beat Trump, and are likely to be again next year.

Some non-profit groups expressed concern that the latest initiative could perpetuate harms from fossil fuels. The Union of Concerned Scientists warned in a statement that the hubs announcement "advances multiple projects premised on fossil fuel-based hydrogen production and risky hydrogen end uses."

US authorities must set rigorous criteria "to ensure the development of a hydrogen industry that is unequivocally aligned with our climate objectives," said Julie McNamara, deputy policy director of the group's climate and energy program. Lauren Pagel, policy director at another nonprofit, Earthworks, charged that prioritizing hydrogen hubs "is more about extending the life of oil & gas companies than addressing the climate crisis."

Frontline communities should have a chance to "meaningfully engage and shape the selected hub proposals," Pagel added. The hydrogen hubs are funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which includes \$65 billion in clean energy investments at the Department of Energy.

Biden has pledged to increase production capacity for low- and zero-carbon emission sources, which are known as "blue" and "green" hydrogen. Blue hydrogen is produced from natural gas in which the carbon dioxide from the manufacturing process is captured. Green hydrogen is produced through renewable sources. — AFP

TSMC seeks permit to export US equipment to China factory

TAIPEI: Taiwanese semiconductor giant TSMC said Friday it has applied for — and expects to receive — permanent authorization from Washington to allow the export of US chip-making equipment to its China-based factory. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the world's largest contract producer of computer chips, was among the firms that received waivers last year when Washington imposed sweeping export restrictions to prevent China from getting advanced semiconductor technology.

The United States says the restrictions are necessary to prevent Chinese advances in cutting-edge computing tech, describing them as a national security threat. But they have sparked concerns among the world's largest chipmakers about the future of their operations in China.

After South Korea announced Monday its chip giants had received the US green light to send equipment to China, attention turned to the Taiwanese firm. "TSMC has been authorized to continue (to) operate in Nanjing and we are currently in the process of applying for a permanent authorization for our operations in China," it told AFP in an email Friday.

It added that the firm was advised by the Bureau of Industry and Security — an agency under the US Department of Commerce — to apply for a "Validated End-User (VEU)" authorization.

This "would serve as a permanent authorization", TSMC said, adding that they have not had to apply for it in the past. "We expect to receive a permanent authorization through the VEU process."

If TSMC's factory in Nanjing is designated as a "verified end user", it would eliminate the need for a separate export approval process. Taiwan's Economic Affairs Minister Wang Mei-hua said earlier in the day that TSMC had "received a waiver extension from the United States". South Korea — home to tech giant Samsung and its smaller rival SK Hynix, both of whom had last year received waivers — announced this week that the US government had designated the companies' factories as "verified end users". — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank participates in IMF meeting

Bank's delegation attends reception organized by Kuwait Banking Association

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank participated in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Meeting 2023, held in Marrakech, Morocco, from 9 to 15 October 2023, in the presence of a large number of monetary and financial policymakers from around the world.

The delegation from Gulf Bank comprised Acting CEO Waleed Khalid Mandani, Acting Deputy CEO Sami Mahfouz and Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications Ahmad Al-Amir.

The annual International Monetary Fund meeting serves as a vital platform for engaging with and heeding the perspectives of numerous government officials, academics, banking executives, and private sector enterprises from around the world. During this event, critical global issues are deliberated, encompassing topics such as the worldwide economic forecast, poverty alleviation, economic growth, and the efficacy of international aid. Additionally, the International Monetary Fund meeting comprises several key committees, notably the Development Committee, the International Monetary and Financial Committee, the Group of Ten, the Group of Twenty-Four, and the Group of Thirty. The Monetary and Financial Committee's session is scheduled to focus on evaluating global economic performance, forecasting future trends, and examining developments in international

financial markets. It will also analyze potential risks that could impact market trends and discuss crucial policies to mitigate the repercussions of these risks.

During the annual IMF meeting, the Gulf Bank delegation participated in a reception hosted by the Kuwait Banking Association. The event was attended by representatives from Kuwaiti banks and a significant number of participants from the meeting.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

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



MARRAKECH: (From right to left), Sami Mahfouz, Waleed Mandani, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Duaij Al-Sabah and Ahmad Al-Amir.

Malaysia unveils new taxes, subsidy cuts in 2024 budget

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia said Friday it will impose new taxes and cut subsidies to boost the nation's fiscal position as it faces headwinds from a sluggish global economy. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said his government will introduce a capital gains tax for the sale of unlisted shares at a rate of 10 percent from March next year, and raise the levy on some sales and services — like logistics and karaoke venues — from 6 to 8 percent.

The measures come as Southeast Asia's fifth largest economy faces anemic global growth, elevated interest rates and a weak ringgit currency.

"As a measure to improve service quality and assistance to the people, the Unity Government is responsible for expanding the revenue base," Anwar said as he unveiled the next financial year's national budget in parliament. "Starting next year, some taxation reform measures will be implemented," he added, including new taxes of 5 to 10 percent on luxury watches and other high-value goods.

The prime minister, who is also the finance minister, revealed a leaner budget of 393.8 billion ringgit (\$83.28 billion), compared to the 397.1 billion ringgit in the current fiscal year.

Some subsidies will be cut, such as for chicken and eggs, since prices have declined, Anwar said, but not other subsidies that would harm poor people if



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim (center) arriving to deliver his speech on the 2024 national budget at the Malaysian Parliament in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

pulled, including for petrol, cooking oil and rice.

The budget for subsidies and social assistance for next year is expected to drop by more than a third, to 52.8 billion ringgit from the projected 81 billion ringgit for 2023. Savings from subsidy cuts will be channelled to increased cash aid for poor people, from 8 billion ringgit to 10 billion ringgit, Anwar said.

Revenue collection will also be improved and corruption leakage plugged, he vowed. Revenue next year is expected to jump to 307.6 billion ringgit from 303.2 billion ringgit. Malaysia's economy is expected to grow by around 4 percent this year, down from a previous estimate of 5 percent. Forecast growth for next year is 4 to 5 percent, according to the prime minister. — AFP



This file photo shows a sign outside the headquarters of JP Morgan Chase & Co in New York.

US banks rise on results, but warn on inflation, wars

NEW YORK: Shares of US banks jumped Friday following strong results, but executives cautioned that beneficial industry conditions were moderating and said wars in Ukraine and the Middle East adding uncertainty.

The robust earnings at JPMorgan Chase, Citi and Wells Fargo reflect a continued boost from higher interest rates, as well as the lift from a persistently healthy US employment market that has limited loan delinquencies. Executives said household balance sheets had eroded somewhat in recent months, but were still above the pre-pandemic level. "US consumers and businesses generally remain healthy, although, consumers are spending down their excess cash buffers," said JPMorgan Chase Chief Executive Jamie Dimon.

Dimon reiterated that the economy faces significant headwinds. "Persistently tight labor markets as well as extremely high government debt levels with the largest peacetime fiscal deficits ever are increasing the risks that inflation remains elevated and that interest rates rise further from here," said Dimon in the earnings press release. "The war in Ukraine compounded by last week's attacks on Zionist entity may have far-reaching impacts on energy and food markets, global trade, and geopolitical relationships. This may be the most dangerous time the world has seen in decades."

Later, on a call with Wall Street analysts, Dimon said investors should not misread the relatively health of financial markets. "My caution is that we are facing so many uncertainties out there," he said.

JPMorgan, the biggest US bank in terms of assets, reported third-quarter profits of \$13.2 billion, up 35 percent from the year-ago period. Revenues rose 22 percent to \$39.9 billion. The biggest factor in the profit jump was the much increased earnings in net interest income (NII), which measures the gap between what the bank makes in interest in loans to clients compared with interest payments to customers. JPMorgan again increased its full-year NII forecast, which essentially shows that the bank has been able to benefit from consumers who have kept money in accounts receiving lower interest than are available elsewhere in the market.

Bank executives have said in recent months that they expect this dynamic to "normalize," reiterating that view on Friday. "We don't know exactly when, but we know it will" normalize, Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Barnum said on a conference call with reporters. "We're going to respond to competition." A second factor behind the strong results has been the continually healthy state of consumer balance sheets, which has limited the number of defaults.

Throughout the COVID-19 period and in the immediate aftermath, consumers have largely successfully managed credit card payments, although delinquencies have risen in recent quarters. JPMorgan actually had lower credit costs compared with the year-ago period, a dynamic not seen at the other two banks that reported Friday. Citi reported profits of \$3.5 billion, up two percent from the year-ago period, while revenues rose nine percent to \$20.1 billion.

Citi's results were also boosted by higher NII, but that was offset somewhat by higher credit costs.

Chief Financial Officer Mark Mason said consumers remain "quite resilient," but credit card payment rates have started to decline "a bit," especially for customers with lower credit scores. The bank still has "a base case" of a "mild" in the first half of 2024, although "the US keeps surprising us with this resilience," Mason said. — AFP

Oil prices surge, stocks stumble as ME fighting rages

NEW YORK: Global markets largely slipped on Friday, while oil prices surged by almost six percent, amid fears that the Zionist entity's imminent ground offensive of Gaza could turn a localized war into a regional conflict and impact oil supplies in the crude-rich Middle East.

Wall Street ended the day mixed, with the tech-rich Nasdaq declining 1.2 percent, and the S&P 500 500 falling 0.5 percent. But the Dow Jones Industrial Average defied the broader downward trend, rising 0.1 percent on the back of positive earnings from JP Morgan and Wells Fargo, two of America's biggest banks. CFRA chief investment strategist Sam Stovall told AFP that "JPMorgan and Wells Fargo set an encouraging pace" with better-than-expected earnings and revenues.

Recent Middle East turmoil means this "may be the most dangerous time the world has seen in decades", JPMorgan Chief Executive Jamie Dimon said in a statement earlier Friday. JPMorgan shares earlier rose 1.5 percent while those of Wells Fargo were lifted 3.1 percent. All the major European markets fell Friday, as the mood among traders turned more pessimistic. Asian markets also declined after Chinese inflation data came in lower than many expected, fueling deflationary concerns in the world's second-largest economy.

Contracts for Brent North Sea crude for De-



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic quotation board displaying stock prices of each company listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange along a street in Tokyo on October 10, 2023. — AFP

cember delivery surged 5.7 percent Friday, while those for America's West Texas Intermediate rose 5.8 percent, as fighting between the Zionist entity and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip continued. Thousands of Palestinians fled from the north to the south of the Gaza Strip on Friday after the Zionist entity warned it is preparing a ground offensive in response to last weekend's attacks, in which Hamas militants killed more than 1,300 people.

"The market expects it to be a very bad weekend in the Zionist entity and Gaza," Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments told AFP. "That the Zionist entity gave notice to the residents to leave suggests it is going to get ugly," he added. Energi Danmark analysts said a recent pipeline sabotage in the Baltic Sea added to "geopolitical uncertainty" in the wake of the the Zionist entity-Hamas conflict. — AFP

as a barometer of the global environment because of its reliance on international trade. Also on Friday, the central bank said it was keeping monetary policy unchanged as core inflation eases. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in its half-yearly statement it will maintain the band at which the Singapore dollar is allowed to move. Singapore uses the exchange rate instead of interest rates to tackle inflation as it imports most of its needs. A stronger local dollar makes imported goods cheaper.

"Global economic activity has moderated reflecting weaker growth in the eurozone and China, even as the US economy has thus far been resilient," the MAS said. "In the near term, global final demand is expected to soften amid elevated interest rates," it said, adding however that "the risk of a sharp global downturn... has receded compared to earlier in the year". The MAS also said that from next year, it will make monetary policy statements on a quarterly basis instead of just twice a year as part of "continuing efforts to enhance monetary policy communications". Singapore in August cut its economic growth forecast this year to 0.5-1.5 percent from a previous estimate of 0.5-2.5 percent. — AFP

US health care provider, unions reach strike deal

LOS ANGELES: US health care provider Kaiser Permanente and unions representing tens of thousands of its staff said Friday they had reached a tentative deal to end what was billed as the sector's biggest ever strike. The stoppage was the latest labor dispute to rock the United States in a year that has seen workers downing their tools from Detroit to Hollywood. "We are excited to have reached a tentative agreement with the frontline health care workers of the @UnionCoalition this morning," the corporation wrote on social media.

More than 75,000 members of the SEIU-UHW and other unions walked out last week in a three-day stoppage that chiefly affected Kaiser Permanente's operations in California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington state. Staff had complained that they were overworked and underpaid, with salaries that were not keeping up with rising prices.

"The frontline healthcare workers of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions are excited to have reached a tentative agreement with Kaiser Permanente," the SEIU-UHW wrote on social media with a picture that included an all-caps "VICTORY." The strike added to the drumbeat of discontent that has seen workers all over the country down tools. American consumers are battling inflation and a cost-of-living crisis that is shrinking real pay packets as prices for everyday staples like gas, groceries and rent continue to rise. Inflation is a global problem driven by the complex interactions of strung-out supply chains, geopolitics and the after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

But its effects are felt locally — and voters tend to blame their politicians. That has created a headache for President Joe Biden, who faces a tough re-election battle next year, likely against populist former president Donald Trump. Biden's administration has gone to pains to present itself as on the side of workers in a number of labor disputes, and got involved in the spat between Kaiser Permanente and its staff.

Both sides said they were "thankful for the involvement" of acting US Labor Secretary Julie Su. Biden on Friday welcomed the tentative agreement, and lavished praise on the health care workers who "kept our hospitals — and our nation — going during the dark months of the pandemic." Biden noted the close involvement of Su in the agreement, which he said was not the first time she had helped workers "build an economy that works for everyone." "I always say that collective bargaining works. It works for UPS drivers and dock workers, writers and millions of American workers who exercise their right to participate in a union," he said. "I'm heartened to see health care workers and their employers take this critical step towards securing the pay, benefits and working conditions these heroes deserve." — AFP

Singapore economy beats third quarter growth forecast

SINGAPORE: Singapore's economy grew faster than expected in the third quarter, preliminary government estimates showed Friday, as construction and services made up for a continued slump in manufacturing.

Gross domestic product expanded 0.7 percent year-on-year in the three months ending September, beating forecasts of around 0.4 percent, and extending the 0.5 percent growth in the previous quarter, the trade ministry said. Construction and services expanded 6.0 percent and 1.9 percent year-on-year, respectively, offsetting a 5.0 percent contraction in manufacturing, extending its decline since the first quarter, according to the data.

Manufacturing covers the semiconductor sector, which is heavily dependent on global demand.

Singapore's economic performance is often seen

Lifestyle



Popcorn buckets are pictured during the "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" concert movie world premiere at AMC The Grove in Los Angeles, California on Oct 11, 2023.



Meredith Miller reacts as she buys merchandise during the concert movie world premiere at AMC Century City on Oct 12, 2023.



Fans attend the "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" concert movie world premiere at AMC Century City. - AFP photos

'SWIFTIES' FLOCK TO MOVIE THEATERS FOR RECORD-BREAKING 'ERAS' FILM

Taylor Swift fans sporting friendship bracelets and glittery cowboy boots packed into early screenings of the pop megastar's concert film at movie theaters across the United States on Thursday. Thanks to the hysteria surrounding the singer's ongoing

the top of my lungs, I will be screaming in my seat, and dancing around, and hopefully trading more friendship bracelets," said Jamie Concha, 20, at a screening in Los Angeles' Century City. "I love every Swiftie. I think we're all very connected," she said, referring

actual tour, or want to relive the phenomenon again, up close and alongside fellow obsessives.

In the concession line before the first screening in Century City, a pair of teenage girls arrived carrying a bag stuffed with friendship bracelets, which they handed out to fellow Swifties. The colorful, beaded accessories have become a key part of "Eras" fandom, with concertgoers creating and swapping bracelets bearing references to their favorite Swift lyrics and quotes. The Midwest-based Marcus Theatres has even promised "friendship bracelet making stations" at its screenings.

Swift-branded popcorn tins

Almost all the moviegoers at Century City on Thursday had been to see the live shows already, and many were planning repeat viewings at the multiplex. "I'm coming to four screenings, and I saw the concert three times," said Amber Eaves, 33. "It was the best concert experience I've ever been to ... I was crying the entire time, I had make-up streaming down my face," said Kasey Longstreet, 24. "It was such a special night that I wanted to come back and see it again."

Domestic opening weekend box office estimates are as high as \$150 mil-



Fans exchange friendship bracelets before the opening night of the concert movie.



Fans on a party bus dance and sing to Taylor Swift before attending the opening night theatrical release of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" concert movie at Regal Webster Place in Chicago, Illinois.



Jamie Concha holds merchandise during the concert movie world premiere.



Fans show off their friendship bracelets before the opening night theatrical release of the concert movie at Regal Webster Place on Oct 13, 2023.

and record-setting world tour, a filmed version of her concert — "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" — is already tipped to be one of the year's biggest movies.

Usual cinema etiquette has been thrown out the window, with multiplexes such as AMC encouraging customers to dance, sing and even take selfies throughout screenings. "At

to the nickname adopted by Swift's fiercely loyal fanbase.

Shot during three recent sold-out Los Angeles shows, the film contains no interviews, commentary or behind-the-scenes footage. Instead, the film's demand relies on drawing fans who missed out on tickets to the

lion — a record for a concert film, and numbers comparable to this summer's reigning smash hit movie, "Barbie." Theaters — still recovering from the pandemic and faced with a dearth of new movies thanks to the ongoing Hollywood strikes — were also cashing in on demand for Swift merchandise Thursday.

AMC charged \$19.99 — a reference to Swift's album "1989" — for Swift-branded popcorn tins. Staff reported fans arriving since the morning just to purchase empty soda cups, at the full price of \$11.99. Some left with the maximum five cups allowed per movie ticket.

The movie had been set to hit screens Friday, but the singer announced on Wednesday that "due to unprecedented demand," preview screenings would begin a day earlier. "I'm already going this weekend, but when she dropped this at the last second, I was like, 'I gotta go after work, oh my god,'" said Eaves. "It's just gonna be one of those cultural phenomena that you can look back and say 'I was a part of that.'" — AFP

Three years after the pandemic wiped out the live music scene, fans are flocking again to see their favorite stars on stage, with Taylor Swift and Beyonce raking it in with tours that are giving local economies a boost.

Big-spending Swifties

Swiftmania is at an all-time high, and it is leaping from the stadium to the cinema, where a film on Swift's Eras tour out Friday in over 100 countries worldwide has already clocked up more than \$100 million in ticket pre-sales. The tour itself, which finishes in December 2024, is poised to become the first tour to make \$1 billion.

According to Maria Psyllou, an economist at Britain's Birmingham University who has written about the trickle-down effect of Swift's tour, the six concerts in Los Angeles added \$320 million to that county's GDP. "A big phenomenon," was how New York Federal Reserve President John Williams described the Taylor Swift effect last month.

Queen B stings

The war in Ukraine is usually cited as a key factor for the cost-of-living crisis in Europe but in Sweden, the party held up as responsible for higher-than-expected inflation in May was none other than Beyonce. Consumer prices rose by a higher-than-expected 9.7 percent in May year-on-year, with increased costs of certain goods and services, such as clothing and hotel visits, offsetting a decrease in electricity and food prices.

Michael Grahn, chief economist for Sweden at Danske Bank, said Beyonce's first two dates on her first solo tour in seven years were probably to blame. Tens of thousands of fans flocked to Stockholm for the gigs, adding between 0.2 and 0.3 percentage points to the inflation caused by hotel and restaurant prices, according to Grahn.

K-pop fever

In its decade-long existence, K-pop boy band BTS — on pause as several members do their compulsory military



Swiftonomics and Beyonce bump: How stars power economies

service — has added billions of dollars to the South Korean economy. The Hyundai Research Institute in 2018 estimated that the first entirely South Korean group to top the US and UK charts brought its country more than \$3.6 billion in annual economic benefits. In 2022, the Korea Institute of Culture and Tourism estimated each BTS

concert made 1.22 trillion won (more than \$900 million).

Beatles nostalgia forever

More than a half century after The Beatles broke up, Liverpool, the birthplace of its four band members, continues to attract nostalgic fans. Beatles-themed museums, restaurants,

souvenir shops and tours of key sites in their journey as a band, including the Cavern Club, where they started out, and the storied Penny Lane all contribute to Fab Four tourism estimated at 120 million pounds annually (nearly \$150 million), according to the city's council.

Liverpool is not alone in the pop

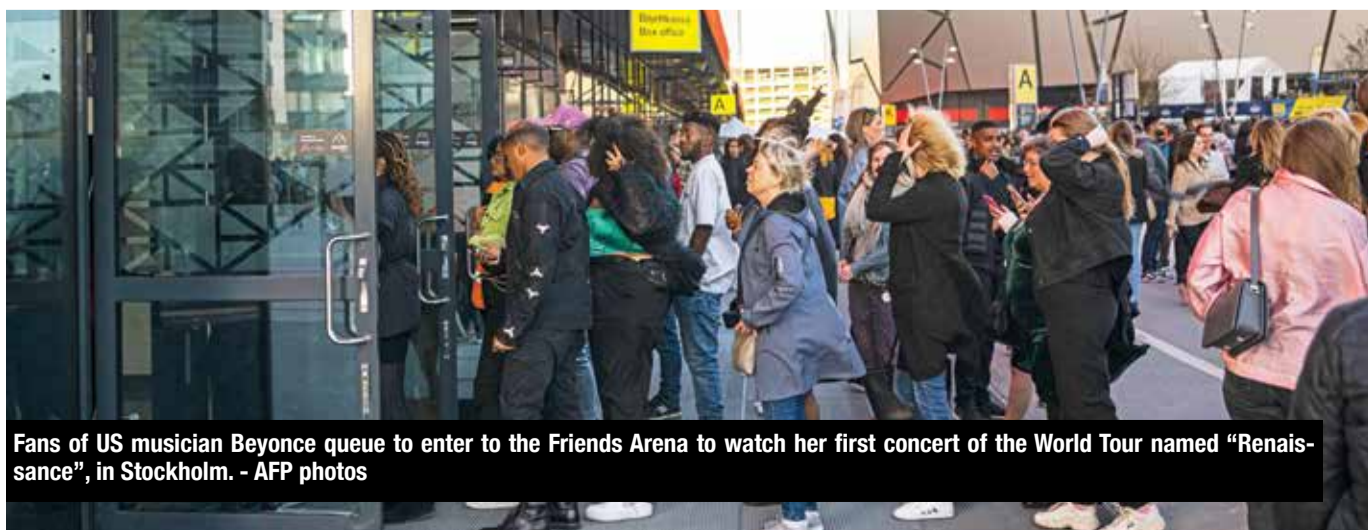
nostalgia market. Memphis in Tennessee, home to Elvis Presley's former property Graceland, is another key site of pilgrimage for fans, while Jamaica is an essential destination for Bob Marley lovers. — AFP



US singer Taylor Swift poses for a photo at the concert movie world premiere at AMC The Grove on Oct 11, 2023.



US singer/songwriter Beyonce



Fans of US musician Beyonce queue to enter to the Friends Arena to watch her first concert of the World Tour named "Renaissance", in Stockholm. - AFP photos

Talks to end Hollywood actors' strike collapse

Talks between Hollywood actors and studios over an ongoing strike have collapsed, in a blow to hopes for a swift end to a crisis that has crippled the entertainment industry. Heads of studios such as Disney and Netflix had been meeting regularly since last week with negotiators for the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), whose members walked off film and TV sets in July.

In a statement late Wednesday, the studios said talks would be suspended, describing the gap between the two sides' positions as "too great," with talks "no longer moving us in a productive direction." Hours later, SAG-AFTRA hit back by accusing the studios of using "bully tactics" and "putting out misleading information" about the negotiations.

Last month the studios struck a deal with Hollywood writers, ending that union's separate stoppage. Given that deal and



SAG-AFTRA members and supporters picket outside Netflix studios on day 91 of their strike against the Hollywood studios on Oct 12, 2023 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

overlaps between SAG-AFTRA's demands and those of the writers, optimism had been growing that a bargain with the actors could also be forged soon.

That hope has now dimmed,

with SAG-AFTRA accusing the studios of not making realistic offers and misrepresenting proposals made during negotiations. "We have negotiated with them in good faith, despite the

fact that last week they presented an offer that was, shockingly, worth less than they proposed before the strike began," the actors' union said.

"The companies are using the same failed strategy they tried to inflict on the (writers' union) — putting out misleading information in an attempt to fool our members into abandoning our solidarity and putting pressure on our negotiators." Even with writers now back to work, most film and TV production cannot restart until the demands of SAG-AFTRA are resolved, costing the entertainment industry and its workers millions of dollars each day.

Like the writers, actors have called for improved pay, greater transparency over profits from hit streaming shows, and protections against the use of artificial intelligence. But the studios, represented by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television

Producers (AMPTP), now accuse actors of making excessive demands — including wanting a share of revenues from streaming shows that "would cost more than \$800 million per year."

At an industry summit in Los Angeles on Thursday, Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos said the actors' demands for a "a certain amount of money for every subscriber" to a streaming platform were "a bridge too far." SAG-AFTRA insists the true cost of its proposal would amount to "less than 57 (US cents) per subscriber each year," accusing the studios of exaggerating the actors' demands.

'Stonewalling and greed'

Despite the back-and-forth, the actors' union said it remains "ready to negotiate today, tomorrow, and every day." The studios added: "We hope that SAG-AFTRA will reconsider and return to productive negotiations soon."

AI has proved a major sticking point in the negotiations. Actors fear that the technology could be used to clone their voices and likenesses, allowing them to be reused in perpetuity without compensation or consent. Studios say they have offered to create strict protections such as requiring actors' "advance consent," and limits on repeated use of a performer's "replica" unless they agree and are paid.

But SAG-AFTRA said the proposal regarding AI was "continuing to demand 'consent' on the first day of employment for use of a performer's digital replica for an entire cinematic universe (or any franchise project)." "We have sacrificed too much to capitulate to their stonewalling and greed," SAG-AFTRA said. — AFP

Actor Michael Caine retires

Veteran British actor Michael Caine, a Hollywood icon with a decades-spanning career littered with awards and acclaim, revealed on Saturday that he has retired from acting at the age of 90.



Actor Michael Caine

The Oscar-winner bows out following another widely-praised performance in his final film, "The Great Escaper", which was released on October 6. In it he plays real-life World War II British veteran Bernie Jordan, who escaped from an elderly residential care home to attend 2014 D-Day celebrations in France.

"I keep saying I'm going to retire. Well I am now," Caine told BBC Radio 4's Today program. "The only parts I'm liable to get now are 90-year-old men. Or maybe 85. 'They're not going to be the lead. You don't

have leading men at 90, you're going to have young handsome boys and girls. So I thought, I might as well leave with all this."

A prolific actor known for his amiable Cockney persona and deadpan acting style, Caine has appeared in more than 160 films during his seven-decade career. Possessing one of Hollywood's most recognizable — and imitated — voices, he has long enjoyed iconic status in Britain, where he became a defining face of the so-called Swinging Sixties.

His filmography includes classic films ranging from "Zulu" and "The Italian Job" to more recently appearing in "Interstellar" and "The Dark Knight" franchise, alongside Christian Bale. A six-time Oscar nominee — who has won two Academy Awards, in 1986 ("Hannah and Her Sisters") and 2000 ("The Cider House Rules") — he has also earned Golden Globes, BAFTAs and numerous other gongs.

He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2000. Caine's acting retirement announcement comes a month before his first novel, "Deadly Game", is scheduled for release. He revealed in June that it had been a long-held ambition to write a thriller, noting it is the genre he most enjoys reading. — AFP



In these file photos by Roscosmos taken on Sept 27, 2023, Expedition 69 NASA astronaut Frank Rubio of the International Space Station (ISS) crew is helped by specialists after his landing in the Soyuz MS-23 capsule in a remote area near the town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan. — AFP photos



US astronaut gets used to Earth after record-setting 371 days in space

After spending more than a year in space, Frank Rubio now has to get used to that pesky thing Earthlings call gravity. "Walking hurts a little bit the first few days, the soles of your feet and lower back," he said at a news conference Friday at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. "I think there is a certain level of pain that comes with the fact that your lower back now supports half your weight."

Rubio returned to Earth two weeks ago after spending 371 days in space, having taken off in September of last year aboard a Russian rocket for what was supposed to be

a routine, six-month mission. The Soyuz spacecraft that was supposed to bring them back was docked at the International Space Station to be used as an emergency backup vehicle. But then it sprung a coolant leak in December, probably due to a micrometeoroid.

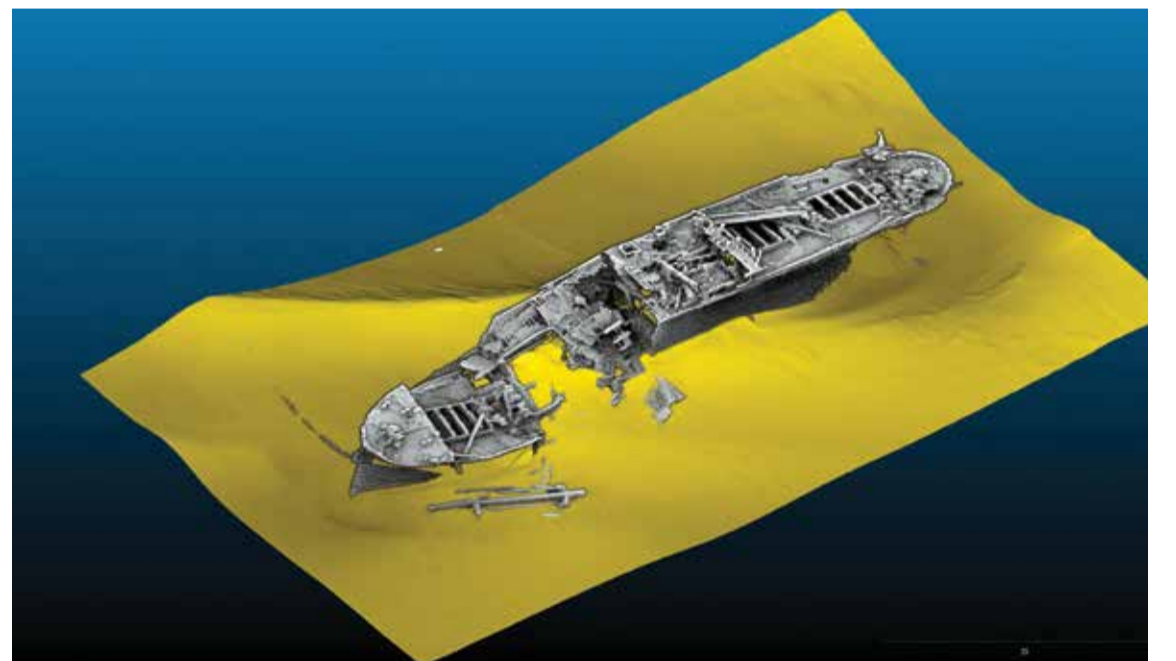
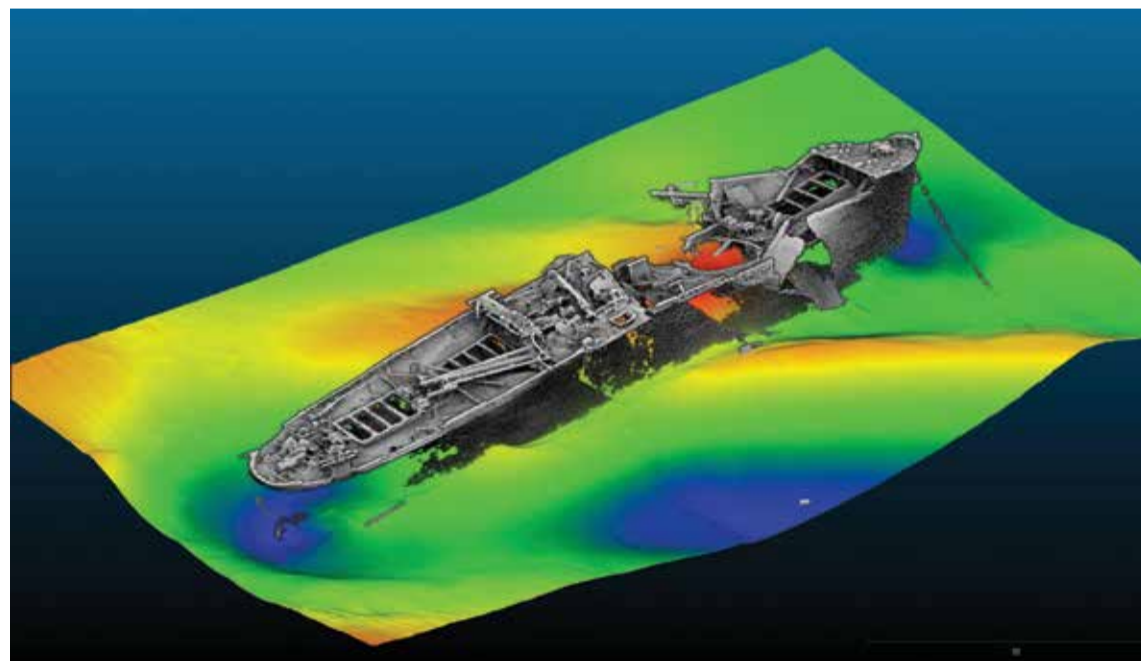
So as a precaution, the Russian space agency, Roscosmos, returned the vessel to Earth. It sent another, empty one — which meant there would be space for Rubio and company to return, but they'd have to pick up the mission slated for the crew originally meant to be on that second ship. "The fact that I was going to spend a whole

year cooped up was a kind of torture for me, because I love being outside," Rubio said. "But that's part of the mission. It took a little bit of a mental shift and saying, 'Hey, this is my world for the next 12 months and I have to deal with that.'"

But the misadventure allowed this son of Salvadoran immigrants to grab the record for the longest time an American has spent in space, breaking the 2022 record set by Mark Vande Hei, at 355 consecutive days. The world record is held by Russian cosmonaut Valeri Poliakov, at 437 days. "For the first few days (back on Earth) you drift to the right or to the

left as you try to walk straight," he says. "Your mind is perfectly clear, but your body just doesn't respond the way you expect it to."

During his stay at the ISS, Rubio notched another potential first when he grew a tomato. "I think what was the first tomato in space," he said. He put it in "a little bag" and fastened it down with Velcro, but ended up losing track of it. Rubio spent hours looking for it to no avail. It may have dried out and been mistaken for garbage. But "some people will say I probably ate it," he jokes. — AFP



These images by the Department of Subaquatic and Underwater Archeological Research shows multibeam 3D imaging of the wreck of French cargo vessel requisitioned for troop evacuation. — AFP photos

ARCHAEOLOGISTS PROBE DUNKIRK SEABED FOR WWII WRECKS

Shattered by bomb impacts, the 100-metre-long British destroyer "Keith" has been lying at the bottom of the Dunkirk channel since its sinking in 1940. It went down during Operation Dynamo, when hundreds of thousands of Allied troops were rescued by sea from the advancing Germans.

Now the World War II warship appears in brightly colored 3D, vertical slice by vertical slice, on the screen of Mark James, a geophysicist from Historic England. James has joined a group of archaeologists taking stock of the traces of the battle still lurking under the waves.

A British government agency, Historic England has joined the search for wrecks dating

to the Dunkirk evacuation run by France's DRASSM, which is in charge of underwater archaeology. Firing sound waves down to the seabed, a multi-beam sonar "allows us to create a really nice 3D model of the seabed and any wrecks and debris," he said.

"It's quite an emotional feeling seeing somebody's wreck come up on the screen," he added. Although a large ship, the "Keith" is set to "disappear bit by bit", said Cecile Sauvage, an archaeologist with DRASSM who is one of those leading the search launched on September 25. Surveying the wrecks now will allow both countries to "preserve the memory of these ships and the human history behind these wrecks", she added.

Perilous crossing

Brought to the big screen in an acclaimed 2017 film by Christopher Nolan, Operation Dynamo ran from May 26 to June 4, 1940. Encircled in northern France by Nazi German forces, the Allies threw everything into a mass evacuation. Over those nine days, 338,220 soldiers — mostly British, but also 123,000 French and 16,800 Belgians — were evacuated on all kinds of vessels, cramming into military ships, fishing trawlers, ferries and tugboats.

The shortest route from Dunkirk to safe harbor across the English Channel in Dover is 60 kilometers (40 miles). But that path was within range of German guns already in place at Calais. "Between 1,000

and 1,500 vessels of all types made the crossing", with 305 sunk by "shelling, enemy torpedoes, mines and even collisions caused by the panic around the operation," said archaeologist Claire Destanque, another of the search mission chiefs. Almost 5,000 of the fleeing soldiers drowned, according to Dunkirk-based historian Patrick Oddone.

'305 stories'

The three-week search by two archaeologists and two geophysicists has quartered the English Channel to tally up the lost ships — the first hunt of its kind in French waters. Volunteer divers had already catalogued the locations of the wrecks, with the scientists' job to confirm the sites and shore up their identifi-

cations by comparing them with archive data.

Sailing on from the "Keith" under the autumn sun, the crew next heads for a French cargo ship, also around 100 meters (yards) along the keel. The "Douaisien" had made the trip from Algeria to unload its goods at Dunkirk before being requisitioned to transport 1,200 soldiers. It had barely left the port before it hit a mine and sank, Claire Destanque recounts.

She points out the point the mine struck on the sonar screen, still visible more than 80 years later. "Knowing the history that's behind it, it's very moving," she says. The campaign has allowed the archaeologists to definitively identify 27 Operation Dynamo wrecks. Three more have been

found but need closer inspection by divers next year given the extent of the damage.

Sauvage says their aim has been "to better locate and get to know the remnants", as well as "to protect them better, especially if there's a construction plan like a wind farm that could destroy them". Plans have been afoot for several years to build turbines in the sea off Dunkirk.

Another benefit of the search is the return to the headlines of "an important milestone" in World War II history that is far less familiar to the French public than in Britain, Sauvage adds. The sunken wrecks represent "305 stories within the sweep of history," Destanque believes. — AFP



Spectators are pictured during the Geoguessr World Cup at the Space Arena, on Oct 14, 2023 in Stockholm. — AFP photos



Mattias "Macken" McCullin who is representing Sweden (right), plays Geoguessr on Oct 12, 2023.

WHERE AM I? GAMING WHIZZES PUT GEOGRAPHY ON THE MAP

The world's best gamers who can identify a location anywhere in the world after seeing an image in less than a second face off Saturday in a world championship in Stockholm. A picture of a sunny paved road appears on a computer screen, bordered by trees and bushes. A red dirt road crosses the paved road, in what appears to be a tropical landscape. "We're going to be in Indonesia because of the sticker on this pole," Trevor Rainbolt of the United States tells AFP.

He clicks on the map and selects what appears to be a random location in Indonesia. Bingo — he's just 88 kilometers (55 miles) from the actual spot. Rainbolt, a fast-talking computer geek, is one of the biggest stars in the Geoguessr game community for his uncanny ability to determine the location of a Google Maps picture in a tenth of a second — less than the blink of an eye.

An AFP reporter watching him play is barely able to see the image in that amount of time, much less guess the country, city or village. "It requires a lot of work and research," Rainbolt admits. "During the pandemic I played around 18 hours a day."



"Debre" (left) representing Hungary plays against "Fungus" from Canada during the Geoguessr World Cup at the Space Arena.

Created by the Swedish trio Anton Wallen, Daniel Antell and Erland Ranvinge, Geoguessr was born on May 10, 2013 when it was published on a popular platform for coders. The idea is simple: a player is dropped somewhere in

the world on Google Maps' Street View and has to guess where he is. He puts his cursor on the world map and clicks on the location he thinks is correct. The closer the player is to the real spot, the more points he gets. "My friend Anton

was playing around with the Application Programming Interface (API) that Google released publicly, so he made a small game and put it on Reddit," Antell told AFP. "Then it went viral."

Poles and plants

On Saturday, 24 players from around the world compete in Stockholm in the first official world championship organized by Geoguessr, with a \$50,000 prize pool. Some 500 spectators are expected, according to event host Space.

That's small in the gaming world: the 2022 League of Legends world championship finals was watched by 18,000 live spectators in San Francisco and around five million others online. Geoguessr has flourished into a company with sales of 200 million kronor (\$18 million), with Antell as chief executive. But neither the company nor the players seem too concerned about whether the game becomes an official eSport.

It's different from other eSports in that "it's more accessible", with both a free and a premium version, explained Wallen. It's also frequently played by kids and in schools. The game now has 65 million registered users worldwide.

"Now we are growing most on mobile and that's a lot more casual players," Wallen said.

The world's top players have a range of clues and tips they use to help them identify locations, after hours spent scrutinizing pictures online. These can be black dots on Argentinian license plates, ground markings in Greece, vegetation or the color of the soil in Africa, or even the position of the camera on Google's cars, which is lower in Sri Lanka and Japan for privacy reasons. "It's a bit of detective work, you have to put all the puzzle pieces together to figure out where you are," says Mattias "Macken" McCullin who is representing Sweden in the championship.

The game has made Rainbolt want to see the world in real life. Last year, he went to Botswana. "Would I have ever gone to Botswana before I started playing this game? Absolutely not," he said. "I have this new-found love for these countries, that I wouldn't have had without this game." — AFP



Daniel Antell, Geoguessr cofounder.



Participants of the Geoguessr World Cup are pictured prior to the start of the championship.



Trevor Rainbolt of the United States, plays Geoguessr on October 12, 2023 in Stockholm. - The world's best gamers who can identify a location anywhere in the world after seeing an image in less than a second face off Saturday in a world championship in Stockholm.

Microsoft and 'Call of Duty' maker seal tie-up

Xbox maker Microsoft closed its blockbuster acquisition of Activision Blizzard, whose video games include "Call of Duty" and "Candy Crush", sealing one of the biggest technology tie-ups in history after overcoming final hurdles on Friday. In a regulatory filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission, the company said the deal was completed, ending nearly two years of stiff scrutiny from regulators, including in the United States.

British regulators were the final obstacle to the deal, and they approved Microsoft's \$69-billion takeover, having blocked the deal in April over competition concerns. The British Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) said in a statement Friday that it had cleared "the new deal for Microsoft to buy Activision without cloud gaming rights" after concluding "it would preserve competitive prices and better services."

Activision Blizzard chief executive Bobby Kotick said the two companies had "all regulatory approvals necessary to close (the deal) and ... look forward to bringing joy and connection to even more players around the world." Microsoft vice chair and president Brad Smith thanked the CMA for its "thorough review" and approval. "We

have now crossed the final regulatory hurdle to close this acquisition, which we believe will benefit players and the gaming industry worldwide," he added in a statement.

Microsoft launched its takeover in January last year, aimed at making it the world's third-largest gaming company by revenue, but it faced strong headwinds from regulators. The CMA had blocked the deal over fears it would damage competition in the fast-growing cloud gaming sector, where games are bought virtually

and players can use a variety of devices rather than just consoles. But it dropped those objections last month ahead of its formal approval Friday.

Microsoft, which already has a stable of games under its belt including "Minecraft", "Elder Scrolls" and "Fallout", is the dominant player in the cloud-gaming world — its Game Pass service claims 25 million subscribers. "Microsoft has the ability to become the biggest gaming force around," Sophie Lund-Yates, lead equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, told AFP on

Friday. "That said, trends can change quickly in the gaming space so it will still need to continue spending the big bucks to make sure the blockbuster titles it now owns remain fan favorites."

More competitive prices

The original deal would have seen popular Activision games including also "Overwatch" and "World of Warcraft" added to its cloud roster, which was too much for the UK regulator to stomach. Under the new deal, Microsoft agreed it would not take control

of the cloud portion of Activision's business, which will be transferred to French studio Ubisoft for 15 years.

"With the sale of Activision's cloud streaming rights to Ubisoft, we've made sure Microsoft can't have a stranglehold over this important and rapidly developing market," CMA chief executive Sarah Cardell said Friday. "As cloud gaming grows, this intervention will ensure people get more competitive prices, better services and more choice. We are the only competition agency globally to have delivered this outcome."

She again hit out over Microsoft's handling of the regulatory process and warned other companies about employing similar tactics. "Microsoft had the chance to restructure during our initial investigation but instead continued to insist on a package of measures that we told them simply wouldn't work. Dragging out proceedings in this way only wastes time and money," she added.

But Alex Haffner, competition partner at UK law firm Fladgate, said "the question that is left hanging ... is whether this case shows a merger oversight system in the UK that is too dogmatic." Aside from the concerns over cloud gaming, regulators had also worried that the initial deal would have allowed Microsoft to make Activision's games exclusive to Xbox.

Sony, which had previously tried to block the Activision deal, agreed with Microsoft in July to keep releasing "Call of Duty" on the PlayStation. The European Union cleared the Microsoft-Activision deal in May while the US antitrust regulator recently paused its attempt to block the buyout following a setback in court. — AFP



Boxes advertising blockbuster video game "Call of Duty" are displayed in a GameStop store in New York on Nov 3, 2014. — AFP

Sports

World Athletics president Coe says IOC made 'only decision' in banning Russia

'Our position at World Athletics is clear on a number of issues since 2015'

MUMBAI: World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said Saturday the International Olympic Committee had made the "only decision left open to them" in suspending Russia's national Olympic body for violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine's membership. The IOC's move, made Thursday during an ongoing executive board meeting in Mumbai, came after the Russian Olympic Committee recognized regional organizations from four Ukrainian territories annexed since Russia's invasion began in 2022.

World Athletics, however, originally excluded competitors, coaches and officials from Russia and Belarus, a supporter of the invasion, from its events as early as March 2022.

'Position is clear'

"I think it was the right decision," Coe told a news conference in Mumbai. "I think it was the only decision that was left open to them (the IOC). 'Our position at World Athletics is clear and has been clear on a number of issues since 2015.' British track great Coe is now in what he says will be the final four years of a stint as World Athletics president that started in

2015. The 67-year-old, a double Olympic 1,500 meters gold medalist, has long been tipped as a future IOC president. But former UK politician Coe, speaking ahead of Saturday's opening ceremony for the IOC session in Mumbai, said: "I'm delighted to be, as ever, representing my sport in the Olympic movement—not the other way round."

The London 2012 Olympic Games chief added: "I don't think it will come as a huge surprise to anybody when I say the Olympic movement has been the largest part of my life...I competed in two Olympic Games, I was very proud to be the leader of a team that delivered the best Olympics ever (London 2012) and I'm now the president of the biggest, largest, Olympic sport."

Coe, however, was more forthcoming as he lauded the rise of Indian athletics following a record haul of 29 medals at the recent Asian Games. As with many sports in India, athletics has long been overshadowed by the national obsession with cricket, while New Delhi's hosting of the multi-sport Commonwealth Games in 2010 was marked by construction delays and accusations of financial mismanagement. Nevertheless, the Athletics Federation of India are



MUMBAI: Sebastian Coe (centre), World Athletics (WA) president, speaks during a press conference on the sidelines of the 141st International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Mumbai on October 14, 2023. — AFP

considering a bid to stage the 2027 World Athletics Championships. And with the likes of India's Olympic and world javelin champion Neeraj Chopra now as well-known as many leading cricketers, Coe said he wanted to see more major athletics events in India.

"It makes economic and it makes athletic sense,"

he said. "I want to see India stage as many of our events as is possible." AFI president Adille J Sumariwalla, alongside Coe, said no decision had yet been made regarding 2027. "We haven't made a formal bid but we are discussing that internally and in the next couple of days we will finalise," said Sumariwalla, also a vice-president of World Athletics.

Coe and Sumariwalla were speaking just hours before the start of Saturday's blockbuster Cricket World Cup match between hosts India and arch-rivals Pakistan — a fixture taking place following this week's decision by the IOC executive board to approve Twenty20 cricket for inclusion at the 2028 LA Games. Coe, whose mother was born in Delhi, joked: "I know there's a rather large sporting event taking place this afternoon... there will be no neutrality from me when I'm watching that game."

But on a more serious note, he said while track and field remained the cornerstone of the Olympics, "you have to accept cricket is a very powerful, strong force in many parts of the world".

Sumariwalla, however, added: "See the winds of change — the cricketers are lining up to take pictures with Neeraj Chopra." — AFP



Al-Kandary with the champions.

Kuwait grabs 2 gold medals in Arab Cup

HURGHADA: Kuwait Triathlon National Team (Hamad Al-Khaldi and Ali Dashti) made yet another achievement by winning two gold medals at the Arab Cup Championship that took place in Hurghada,

Egypt. The Triathlon Club players won several medals at the Bahrain League Championship. Meanwhile, chairman of the Board of the Triathlon Federation and Club Rashid Al-Kandary lauded these major achievements at the Arab Cup and Bahrain, adding that such feats are made due to major efforts and hard work by players and the technical departments. Al-Kandary commended the support of the Public Authority for Sport, Kuwait Olympic Committee for the federation and club which helped the players make such wins.

Two's a crowd: From Houston to Ahmedabad for Pakistan fans

AHMEDABAD: With their green shirts drowning in a sea of blue, Mohammad Uzair and Asif Syed Ali were a rare sight in Ahmedabad — two Pakistan fans in an Indian dominated crowd of around 120,000 witnessing the biggest show in cricket.

The friends had travelled from their homes in Houston for Saturday's World Cup clash, vowing to match their counterparts "chant for chant". The two joined Mohammad Basheer, also from the United States, as part of the small number of Pakistan fans at the Narendra Modi Stadium, the biggest cricket stadium in the world.

World Bowling Championship finals today

KUWAIT: Today will mark the end of the World Bowling Championship that was held in Kuwait from October 4th to the 15th with 400 players of both genders representing 36 national teams.

The final event today will be the group competition which promises to be the strongest and most competitive between all participating teams as all are competing for the title due to the moral and material returns.

Al-Ali, member of the Oman Bowling Federation, Head of the National Teams Ahmad Khamis Al-Ali said the tournament in Kuwait was exceptional and well organized in the history of the tournaments.

He added that Kuwait reflected the exceptional image of bowling in the Gulf, and this led to the having the world's confidence in Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad to lead the world's bowling sport.

He said that Sheikh Mohammad moved bowling in



the Gulf to being global as he provided all possible means to come in touch with the best schools and players at world's level.

Meanwhile Oman's Bowling Federation member Mousa Al-Maimani said Kuwait presented the best world tournament of the bowling sport. He said that Oman, like the rest of countries will not spare any effort in supporting the international federation to continue its development and advancement at the world level.



Flintoff reaches settlement over 'Top Gear' crash

LONDON: The BBC said Saturday it has agreed a financial settlement with England cricket legend Andrew "Freddie" Flintoff after he was seriously hurt while filming for its popular show "Top Gear". The British broadcaster's commercial arm BBC Studios did not specify the settlement figure with the former England captain over the crash, but it reportedly totals £9 million (\$11 million).

The 45-year-old celebrated former all-rounder was hospitalized and has endured a slow recovery since the driving accident while filming for the hit motoring programme last December. "BBC Studios has reached an agreement with Freddie that we believe supports his continued rehabilitation, return to work and future plans," a BBC Studios spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have sincerely apologized to Freddie and will continue to support him with his recovery," BBC Studios is a commercial company which does not use income generated from the publicly-funded licence fee used by other arms of the UK broadcaster.

In September, Flintoff appeared in public for the first time since the accident, still sporting facial injuries, after he was coaxed into joining England's backroom staff in an unpaid capacity. He played 79 Tests and 148 one-day internationals for England before retiring from cricket aged 32.

He has gone on to have a successful career in television, including co-presenting "Top Gear". During his cricket career, Flintoff played a pivotal role in England winning the Ashes in 2005 and 2009. — AFP



Al-Jassim with the riders.

Not afraid of India's 7-0 ODI World Cup record against Pakistan, Ali hoped the jinx would be broken. "Seven is just a number and I see a brake on India's sequence today," said Ali. He added in a spirit of companionship: "But we are wearing Indian blue shirts underneath. In case they win, we will project that blue shirt."

Both men are fans of India batting star Virat Kohli. "Kohli is a world class player and those who compare others with Kohli have no knowledge of cricket," said Ali, who hopes Pakistan pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi excels in Saturday's match. "Shaheen is a world class bowler and I hope he gets wickets against India, but not Kohli!"

Also in the crowd was Mohammad Shahzad who has an Indian wife, Shabana. The couple live in Norway. "I got a visa without delay and came last night," Shahzad told AFP. "But it's disappointing that there are Pakistan fans missing. It's a sea of blue but I don't mind if Pakistan win." — AFP

Ghazi Al-Jraiwi crowned show jumping champion

KUWAIT: Kuwait Riding Club's Ghazi Al-Jraiwi won the Kuwait Riding Center's Show Jumping Championship that was held on Friday in Sabhan. Al-Jraiwi took first place in the main fifth run at the height of 130 cm in 80.20 seconds and second place in 85.20 followed by Shaker Al-Kazemi in third place.

Technical Director of Kuwait Equestrian Federation, member of the Asian federation awarded the winners with their trophies and prizes. In the fourth run at a height of 120 cm Hamad Al-Hajiri was first. The third run at 110 cm was won by Fawaz Al-Ghunaiman.

Sports

Nayacalevu says Fiji aim to 'make history' in World Cup

'We have a nation of 900,000 people that lives and breathes rugby'

MARSEILLE: Fiji captain Waisea Nayacalevu says his country will be carrying the hopes of an entire region when they look to make history against England at the World Cup in Marseille on Sunday. The Flying Fijians are playing in the quarter-finals for just the third time.

They are one of only three Tier II teams to have reached this stage of the competition - Samoa in 1991 and 1995, and Japan in 2019 - but none of them have ever been beyond that. "We want to make history," said Nayacalevu. "We have a lot of support from neighboring countries so we're representing all the South Pacific." It is not just the Pacific nations Samoa and Tonga cheering on Fiji, but all Tier II nations, said head coach Simon Raiwalui, who has become something of a global spokesman for those without a place at rugby's top table.

"I'm proud to be Fijian but I'm also proud of the so-called developing nations, really pushing for the global game, how we improve it, create opportunities, how we break that barrier down," he said. "This World Cup has been a fantastic example of other teams coming in... and playing fantastic rugby and putting on a spectacle for the world."

In Fiji, the excitement has been building ahead of this match, with fans going to extraordinary lengths to watch their matches in the early hours of the morning. "We understand how hard outside the cities it is to get to watch the matches," said Raiwalui.

"We've seen videos of people out in the boat or up on the hills just finding sources where they can get electricity, where they can get wifi just to watch the game. "We understand how much it means to them, we appreciate every supporter that we have and we just want to do the country proud".

"We have a nation of 900,000 people that lives

and breathes rugby," he added. "And we have massive support from the French people that come to the ground." That last point has not been lost on the England players, with replacement No.8 Billy Vunipola saying earlier this week that his team are happy to be "public enemy number one" in France. Fiji are most non-Fijians' second favorite team.

'Take your opportunities'

England coach Steve Borthwick has picked captain Owen Farrell at fly-half and dropped George Ford to the bench, despite his man-of-the-match displays in pool stage victories over Argentina and Japan. Raiwalui has known both fly-halves since they were children, when he was a player at Saracens.

Ford's father Mike was the coach and Raiwalui played alongside Farrell's father Andy, who is now in charge of Ireland. "Both are world class players," said Raiwalui. "Owen is obviously one of the best fly-halves in the world, week in, week out."

"He's good at all phases of the game. I think he gets quite a bit of unwarranted flak from his own home country, his own supporters sometimes. "He's earned everything he has at the moment, he's a fantastic player."

England may be favorites in the quarter-final but it is less than two months since they suffered a shock first defeat to Fiji — and that at their Twickenham home. "It helps to have played against them not so long ago but at the same time we feel like we've moved on," said Farrell.

"We've been building since then," he added. Borthwick has urged his players to rekindle the spirit of 2007 - his only World Cup as a player - and prove the doubters wrong. Then-reigning champions, England were largely written off after being hammered



MARSEILLE: Fiji's center Waisea Vuidravuwalu takes part in a training session at the Roger Couderc stadium in Marseille during the France 2023 Rugby World Cup. — AFP

36-0 by South Africa in the pool stage. But they bounced back to upset Australia and hosts France in the knock-out stages before losing narrowly to the Boks in the final.

"You've got to take the opportunities that are presented to you," said Borthwick. "As a rugby

player I thought I had an opportunity in 2003 and didn't get picked. "I went in 2007 and thought I'd be there in 2011, but I wasn't so I played in (only) one tournament. "I want the players to embrace this challenge and have the time of their lives representing England." — AFP

Giro lays late trap on the 2024 run to Rome

MILAN: The Giro d'Italia's roads will lead to Rome again in the 2024, but the route unveiled on Friday showed they will run over some daunting mountain stages in the Dolomites. The 20th and penultimate stage could decide the winner of the 2024 Giro, as it includes two climbs of 1,775m Monte Grappa.

"For me, this is the stage that holds my attention," said reigning champion Primoz Roglic. After eight seasons with the team, now called Jumbo-Visma, Roglic will be riding for Bora-Hansgrohe when he defends his title. The riders will "have to be ready from the first week, as the difficulties are spread out over the three weeks of the race", said Giro director Mauro Vegni.

The route covers a total of 3,319 km, the shortest since 1979, with four stages longer than 200 kilometers. It has a total altitude difference of 42,900m, down from 51,400m in 2023. Giro organiser RCS Sport also

end with a climb to 1,450m on Prati di Tivo. The second week concludes with a second time-trial, this time over 31 km which acts as a prelude to a fearsome sequence of three mountain stages in the Dolomites. The 20th and penultimate stage could decide the winner of the 2024 Giro, as it includes two climbs of 1,775m Monte Grappa.

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TRENTO: Italian Minister for Agriculture Francesco Lollobrigida (L) and RCS Media group owner Urbano Cairo (R) pose with the "Trofeo Senza Fine" (Endless Trophy) after the presentation of the 2024 Giro d'Italia cycling race at the Teatro Sociale in Trento, northern Italy. — AFP

announced that the women's edition would be called the Giro d'Italia Women and, they said, would benefit from the same level of organisation

as the men's race. The women's race will take place from July 7 to 14 and its route will be unveiled in the coming weeks. — AFP

Astros meet Rangers while Phillies face Arizona in MLB playoffs

WASHINGTON: Superstar pitcher Justin Verlander will take the mound for the defending champion Houston Astros against the visiting Texas Rangers on Sunday, when the Major League Baseball playoffs resume. The 40-year-old American right-hander, a three-time winner of the Cy Young Award as best pitcher, has been a key figure in the Astros dynasty, playing in the American League Championship Series for a seventh consecutive campaign.

"What's so magical about this team is these guys don't take a day off," Verlander said. "They don't take anything for granted and come with desire. "I know that sounds weird being in the playoffs, but when you've been to the playoffs as many times as we have in a row, I think it's harder to not take things for granted, but we surely do not."

The Astros are trying to become the first World Series repeat champion since the New York Yankees took three in a row from 1998 to 2000. In their epic run, Houston have won six AL West division titles and four AL crowns as well as the World Series in 2017 and last year.

The Astros are facing an AL West division rival

in the best-of-seven AL final. Houston took the regular-season series with the Rangers 9-4 and edged their in-state rivals to capture the division title on the final day of the regular season.

"It's going to be a good battle," Astros outfielder Michael Brantley said. "We're really familiar with one another. I know we have a lot of history and we look forward to going out there game one and competing against them."

Upstarts Philadelphia and Arizona will meet in the National League Championship Series starting Monday in Philadelphia. The Phillies eliminated MLB wins leader Atlanta in the second round. The Braves had finished 14 games ahead in the NL East division. The Diamondbacks swept the Los Angeles Dodgers, who led Arizona by 16 games in the NL West.

The Rangers, in their first ALCS since 2011, swept AL wins leader Baltimore in the second round while Houston ousted Minnesota. "It's going to be a test," Astros outfielder Chas McCormick said. "A little AL West rivalry and it's going to be fun. We play these guys a lot, and that's a good team over there, so we need to show up."

Verlander, a nine-time All-Star and the 2011 AL Most Valuable Player, missed the 2021 season after "Tommy John" tendon-replacement surgery but returned to help Houston win the World Series last season before becoming a free agent.

He signed a two-year deal worth \$86 million with the New York Mets but the struggling club

traded him to Houston in August and, after his return to the Astros, Verlander went 7-3 with a 3.31 earned-run average over 11 starts, then allowed only one run over 13 playoff innings in triumphs over Seattle and Minnesota.

Verlander's 17 career playoff wins are only two shy of the record of 19 set by former Astros and Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte. "I certainly couldn't have planned this or seen it coming, but obviously, things work out for a reason," Verlander said.

The Rangers have only reached the ALCS twice before, in 2010 and 2011. They won both but then lost the World Series each time.

Arizona, tries to make the World Series for the first time since 2001, when they ended the Yankees' title run. The Phillies, who lost last year's World Series to the Astros in six games, have not won the MLB crown since 2008.

Philadelphia's Nick Castellanos became the first player in MLB history to hit multiple homers in back-to-back playoff games when he blasted two solo homers in each of the two home wins that ended Atlanta's hopes.

In both contests, the outfielder's blasts swung the game to the Phillies when it seemed Atlanta might seize command. "We know how important momentum is in these post-season games," Castellanos said. "Anytime you feel it may be swinging in the other direction, we do a very good job of locking it in to get the momentum back in our favor." — AFP

LPGA's Thompson misses cut at PGA's Shriners Children's Open

LAS VEGAS: The LPGA's Lexi Thompson missed the cut at the PGA's Shriners Children's Open despite shooting a two-under par round of 69 on Friday. Thompson, who shot a first-round 73, ended on an even-par 142 with the cut set at three-under. Cameron Champ and Lanto Griffin shared the lead on 12-under par, a stroke ahead of Sweden's Henrik Norlander.

Thompson, a 28-year-old Floridian, missed a six-foot putt for birdie on her final hole, which would have matched the lowest score on the PGA Tour by a woman. Michelle Wie West shot 68 in the 2004 and 2006 Sony Open in Hawaii. Thompson was looking to become the first woman to make the cut on the PGA Tour since Shirley Spork achieved a 105th-place result at the 1952 Barracuda Championship.

"I'm very proud. I played really well today, came out super early, and bogeyed 17 but made a great save on 18 there, and just overall played very steady," she said. "As the day went on, I tried to stay committed to my targets out there and to my swing thoughts, and just enjoyed the whole experience," added Thompson, who was playing on a sponsor's exemption.

After play finished early due to bad light on Thursday, Thompson had to come back out to finish off her last two first-round holes — making a bogey on the 17th and a par on the last. After a bogey at the 10th hole to begin her second round, she made three birdies before the turn and then put the cut within her sights after successive birdies on the first and second.

But bogeys on the par-3 fifth and eighth holes undid her hopes. She went out of bounds with her drive on the fifth, being forced to take a penalty, and then two-putted on the eighth. "I knew once I had made a few birdies in a row that I would be somewhat close, but I knew the cut line would keep on going lower and lower with these guys, especially with not that much wind out there," she said.

"I just really tried to stay focused on my game and focused on my swing thoughts, picking small targets and staying 100 percent committed, and whatever happens, happens." Thompson, who won her sole major at the 2014 Kraft Nabisco Championship, last took an LPGA title at the 2019 ShopRite Classic.

Her most recent title came in a Ladies European Tour event in New York in October 2022. She enjoyed plenty of support from the crowd at TPC Summerlin in Las Vegas but said the attention from fans and the media hadn't added to the pressure. "It was more energizing. Seeing the people out there and hearing the cheers and seeing all the little kids, that's what I play for," she said. "No matter what I'm shooting, I could shoot 80, and they'd be like, you did great. That's what it's all about, just inspiring." — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	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

Change of Name

I, **Natasha** holder of Indian Passport #Z4825793 have changed my name to be **Natasha Priti Menezes (New Name)** from **Natasha Priti Menezes Fernandes (Old Name)** (C#4244) **15-10-2023**

I, **VINITHA ROSHNI DSOUZA** holder of Passport No.

X5373929 do hereby change my name to **VINEETHA ROSHNI** (as Given name) **DSOUZA** (as Surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name **VINEETHA ROSHNI DSOUZA** and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C#4243) **12-10-2023**

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Rohit hits 86 as India hand Pakistan 7-wicket WCup rout

Total was Pakistan's third lowest against India in the World Cup



AHMEDABAD: India's KL Rahul (C) plays a shot during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between India and Pakistan at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on October 14, 2023. — AFP

AHMEDABAD: Skipper Rohit Sharma's 86 and an inspired bowling display helped India hammer Pakistan by seven wickets in their high-profile World Cup clash at the 132,000-capacity Ahmedabad stadium on Saturday. India bowled out Pakistan for 191 after their rivals collapsed from 155-2. They overhauled the total with 117 balls to spare to extend their unbeaten streak against their neighbors to eight in the 50-over showpiece tournament.

Rohit stood out in his 63-ball knock laced with six fours and six sixes to keep India, who began the event as favorites to win the title, unbeaten in their three matches in this edition. Pakistan now have two wins and one defeat in the 10-nation tournament. "It felt good," said man of the match, Indian fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah who had figures of 2-19 off nine overs.

Rohit hit the ball to all parts of the ground with his delightful flicks and pulls to entertain an almost all-Indian crowd at the world's biggest cricket stadium after Pakistanis were effectively banned from attending. India lost Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli - both for 16 - before Rohit and Shreyas Iyer, who hit the winning four to reach 53, put on 77 runs for the third wicket and placed India comfortably on course for victory.

Rohit fell attempting another hit off Shaheen Shah Afridi to get caught at mid-wicket, but Iyer and KL Rahul took the team home with ease. Bowlers set up victory after India elected to field and Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah, Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja took two wickets each. Pakistan were bowled out in 42.5 overs, losing eight wickets for 36 runs in 80 balls.

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'One of those days'

The total was Pakistan's third lowest against India in the World Cup after their 173 in Sydney (1992) and

180 at Manchester (1999). Pakistan started strongly but lost their openers before skipper Babar Azam (50) and Mohammad Rizwan (49) attempted to rebuild and hit back in their stand of 82.

Azam reached his fifty off 57 balls with a boundary but fell in the next over, bowled by Siraj as the crowd roared to see the back of the world's number one ODI batsman. Kuldeep Yadav soon struck twice in an over to send back the left-handed Saud Shakeel and Iftikhar Ahmed, bowled around the legs for four after the ball deflected off the batsman's gloves.

Bumrah denied Rizwan his fifty with a slower-off cutter that rattled the stumps as Pakistan slipped to 168-6. Bumrah, playing in front of his home crowd, had a spring in his step and struck again in the next over to get Shadab Khan out for two before Pandya and Jadeja combined to wrap up the tail.

"You try to analyze the wicket as soon as possible so when we started bowling, we came to know that the wicket was on the slower side and a hard length would make run-scoring more difficult," added Bumrah. "There was no consistent turn but it was turning a little bit and I count my slower ball as a spinner so I thought it might be an option. I was trying to do that and it gripped - it was one of those days."

The hotly-anticipated match raised enormous interest with city hotels booked and desperate fans even booking full-body check ups in local hospitals to be sure of a place to sleep. A prominent hotel in the city usually charges 6,000 rupees (\$72) for a deluxe room but on Friday, Saturday and Sunday the price for a day had been hiked to 70,000 rupees (\$841). Only a trickle of Pakistanis, many expatriates, made it to the game after fans from across the border endured visa delays. — AFP

France, Belgium, Portugal survive to reach Euro 2024

PARIS: France, Belgium and Portugal all blinked with a Euro 2024 place in their grasps but clung on for one-goal victories on Friday night which made them the first sides to qualify for next year's tournament.

Belgium led by three goals in Vienna and won 3-2 with 10 men to ensure a top-two finish in Group F and a ticket to the finals in Germany. France led by two Kylian Mbappe goals in Amsterdam and beat the depleted Dutch 2-1.

Cristiano Ronaldo was another to score twice but Portugal also wobbled with a two-goal lead before beating Slovakia 3-2 in Porto in Group J. In Amsterdam, Mbappe leapt to hook home a volley after seven minutes and then added a second eight minutes into the second half with a sumptuous curler.

It was his 42nd international goal, overtaking French legend Michel Platini and putting him fourth in the all-time list. Quilindschy Hartman replied on his Dutch debut but Mbappe almost clinched his hat-trick, when his late drive hit the crossbar.

"We mustn't get carried away, but we must appreciate and not trivialize things," said France coach Didier De-

schamps. "To qualify with two games to go, with six wins, 13 goals scored and just one conceded, I'm very proud of what the group has achieved, both in terms of spirit and on the pitch."

"We got the result we wanted, we achieved our objective." Greece won 2-0 in Dublin to eliminate Ireland and pull clear of the Dutch. Giorgos Giakoumakis and Giorgos Masouras scored in the first half for the 2004 European champions who moved three points clear of the Dutch. The two nations meet on Monday in Athens.

Ronaldo double

Unbeaten Belgium survived an Austria fightback in Vienna. Dodi Lukebakio, with his first two international goals, and captain Romelu Lukaku with his ninth of the campaign, put Belgium 3-0 up after 58 minutes.

Konrad Laimer replied with a long-range drive. With Belgium reduced to 10 men when Amadou Onana collected a second yellow card, Arthur Theate handled in his own box with six minutes left. Marcel Sabitzer converted the penalty to make it an anxious last few minutes for the Belgians.

But they held out to secure a third straight trip to the Eu-



AMSTERDAM: France's forward Kylian Mbappé (L) fights for the ball with Netherland's defender Jeremie Frimpong © during the Euro 2024 qualifying football match between the Netherlands and France at the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam. — AFP

ros. The Red Devils' last Euro qualifying loss was a 1-0 defeat in Wales in June 2015. Austria remains seven points clear of idle Sweden, who have a game in hand.

Cristiano Ronaldo moved to 125 international goals as the Portuguese made it seven wins from seven matches in Group J. They have 21 points which ensures them a top two finish. Goncalo Ramos had opened the scoring for Portugal. Ronaldo then converted a penalty.

David Hancko's deflected strike gave Slovakia hope - the first goal Portugal had conceded in qualifying - but Ronaldo soon tapped in a Bruno Fernandes cross. Stanislav Lobotka's long-range strike made for

a nervy finale but Portugal held on. "Cristiano Ronaldo is having a great time, playing a lot of minutes and scoring a lot of goals for his club," said Portugal coach Roberto Martinez.

"He has a lot of experience with the national team and he's a reference point for young players." Slovakia stayed second in the group, but the pursuers inched closer. Third-place Luxembourg drew 1-1 in Iceland to close to two points behind Slovakia who visit the Duchy on Monday.

Bosnia and Herzegovina are a further two points back after beating Liechtenstein 2-0 with first-half goals from Amar Rahmanovic and Miroslav Stevanovic. — AFP

Watkins lifts England to friendly win over Australia

LONDON: Gareth Southgate slammed the fans who booed Jordan Henderson as England's understudies earned a 1-0 win against Australia thanks to Ollie Watkins' second half strike in Friday's friendly at Wembley. Southgate was furious at the abuse of Henderson as England's stand-in skipper was jeered by the Wembley crowd when he was substituted in the second half. The Al-Ettifaq midfielder's England inclusion has been controversial following his switch from Liverpool to Saudi Arabia, with critics claiming he has let down the LGBTQ+ community after previously expressing support for them.

Henderson also triggered a recent backlash when he supported the Saudi bid to host the 2034 World Cup. "I really don't understand it. He is a player with a lot of caps for England, his commitment and what he has delivered for England is exceptional," Southgate said.

"His role in the group is phenomenally important. He is a brilliant role model in his professionalism. I know why the booing happened but it defies logic to me. I'm incredibly impressed with the impeccable morals of everyone else in the country."

"We play Italy on Tuesday. Come on, let's get behind this team." Southgate fielded an experimental side as he rested the majority of the players likely to feature in Tuesday's crucial Euro 2024 qualifier against Italy, which could seal England's place at next year's tournament. Few of Southgate's reserves made a convincing case to feature in the Italy game in a largely underwhelming performance. Aston Villa striker Watkins has no chance of starting ahead of England captain Harry Kane — who was rested for

this match — but he did at least remind Southgate of his predatory instincts with a clinical finish. While England and Australia have fierce cricket and rugby rivalries, there is far less enmity between the nations on the football pitch given their lack of matches against each other. This drab encounter appropriately finished to swathes of empty seats as fans made an early exit.

"It's tough when you haven't got a lot of caps behind you. We were not cohesive, but I gave the players a really tough challenge. Australia were athletic and well organized, so I'm pleased for the win," Southgate said.

Australia assistant coach Rene Meulensteen, deputizing for Graham Arnold during the press conference after the Socceroos boss lost his voice, added: "You have to give our boys enormous credit for their bravery. We had the courage to press a big team. "We showed we can go toe to toe with the big nations. We've grown a lot today for sure." Henderson, Jack Grealish and Trent Alexander-Arnold were the only players with more than 10 caps in Southgate's starting line-up and it showed in the incoherent display. Among the new faces in England's unfamiliar line-up were Chelsea defender Levi Colwill, making his debut in a back four featuring fellow international novices Lewis Dunk and Fikayo Tomori.

Arsenal striker Eddie Nketiah made a quiet debut as a second half substitute, while West Ham winger Jarrod Bowen showed little of the quality that makes him a key player for the Europa Conference League holders. — AFP