

4 Supreme Council for Planning: Kuwait first country to join BRI

5 Pakistan court grants bail to ex-PM Sharif ahead of return

13 Netflix gains subscribers with ads and password crackdown

16 Benzema, French minister clash; Salah calls to end Gaza massacres

Medics, students stand in solidarity with Palestine

Kuwait: Gaza hospital attack violated int'l humanitarian law



KUWAIT: (Left) Medical staff of Sabah Hospital stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people on Oct 19, 2023. (Right) Students of Mariya Al-Qibtiyya Girls High School hold a presentation on Zionist massacres on Oct 19, 2023. — KUNA photos

Protesters in US Congress urge Gaza ceasefire

WASHINGTON: At least a hundred protesters occupied a building of the US Congress on Wednesday urging lawmakers and Joe Biden's administration to push for a ceasefire in Gaza, which has been under Zionist airstrikes since a deadly Hamas attack. Dressed in black T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Jews say cease fire now" and "Not in our name", the activists sat clapping and singing on the floor in the rotunda of the Cannon House Office building and held up large banners that read "Ceasefire" and "Let Gaza Live".

Capitol police said protests are not allowed inside the building and several demonstrators were arrested. "We warned the protestors to stop demonstrating and when they did not comply we began arresting them," the US Capitol police said in a statement on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The protest was organized by the Jewish Voice for Peace, a Jewish anti-Zionist organization. Before the sit-in, hundreds of people had gathered on the National Mall near the Capitol urging the Biden administration to call for a ceasefire. "Biden really is the only one that has the power to pressure (the Zionist entity) right now and he needs to use that power to save innocent lives," Hannah Lawrence, 32, who came from the northeastern US state of Vermont.

Linda Holtzman, 71, a rabbi from Philadelphia, demanded an immediate ceasefire and urged Biden to "open your eyes". "Look at what's happening in Gaza. Look at the devastation in Gaza," said Holtzman. "If you want to be able to live with yourself, you need to stand up and end the genocide. I demand a ceasefire right now." — AFP

KUWAIT/NEW YORK: Medical staff in Kuwait stood for 15 minutes on Thursday in a show of solidarity and support with the Palestinian people. During the event, the medical professionals also denounced the Zionist occupation's vicious bombing of Ahli Arab Hospital that left in its wake hundreds killed and injured.

The medical faculty condemned the targeting of medical facilities and the flagrant violation of international humanitarian laws and basic human values, and called for the immediate end to aggression against Gazans. The event came as per the instructions of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, organized so that it does not interfere with providing patients with care.

Meanwhile, schools all over the country stood in

solidarity on Thursday with Palestine by raising flags and holding posters during the morning assembly. Students also held up pictures and wore the traditional Palestinian keffiyeh scarf in support of Palestine, denouncing the horrific actions of the Zionist occupation forces, which has resulted in the death of 3,785 martyrs and 12,000 injured.

Acting Undersecretary of the Educational Development and Activities Sector at the Ministry of Education Dr Ghanim Al-Sulaimani said in a press release that the ministry of education issued a statement for schools to show support for Palestine during the morning assembly by organizing activities that educate the students regarding this cause.

In this regard, Mariya Al-Qibtiyya Girls High School held an exhibition that displayed the Pales-

tinian map and holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as artworks and pictures expressing the Palestinians' right to defend their land. Students also held presentations of scenes of violence and killings carried out by the Zionist occupation forces against the people of Gaza.

Kuwait has affirmed that the attack on Gaza's Ahli Arab Hospital was a violation of international humanitarian law, calling to take serious measures to protect civilians. In a speech during the meeting of the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, in charge of social, humanitarian and cultural affairs, late Wednesday, the diplomatic attache of Kuwait's permanent delegation to the UN Ahmad Al-Daikan said that the whole world witnessed the Zionist entity's brutality in the bombing of the hospital

Continued on Page 6

Palestinians await aid trucks; Sunak meets Bibi, MBS

GAZA: Palestinians in war-torn Gaza on Thursday eagerly awaited the arrival of aid trucks promised in a deal struck by US President Joe Biden, as the Zionist entity's military kept up its bombardment of targets in the Hamas-run enclave. Egyptian state-linked broadcaster Al Qahera News said the Rafah border crossing — the only one in and out of besieged Gaza not controlled by the Zionist entity — would open on Friday.

Biden, on a flying visit to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet on Wednesday, reiterated strong US support for its long-time ally but also stressed the need to address the plight of Palestinian civilians. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Thursday became the latest foreign leader to make a solidarity visit to the Zionist entity, meeting Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog. He backed Zionist action but also stressed the need to get aid into Gaza, before jetting to Saudi Arabia for talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

More than 100 trucks carrying aid have been queuing for days on the Egyptian side of the border, with the United Nations and others calling for urgent help for besieged civilians. On a visit to Cairo, UN

Continued on Page 6



RIYADH: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Oct 19, 2023. — AFP

Egypt, Jordan slam 'collective punishment'

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II condemned the "collective punishment" of Palestinians in Gaza as they met in Cairo for talks on the Zionist-Hamas war. Ahead of the meeting, the Jordanian royal court said Sisi and King Abdullah would "discuss means to stop the Israeli aggression on Gaza".

In separate statements issued later, the Egyptian presidency and the royal court said the two leaders "affirmed their unified position rejecting the policy of collective punishment in the siege, starvation or displacement" of Palestinians. The Zionist entity has been carrying out air and artillery strikes on Gaza since Hamas gunmen unleashed a massive attack on Israel on Oct 7 that Zionist officials say killed more than 1,400 people.

The Hamas-controlled health ministry says Zionist strikes have killed 3,785 people in the besieged Palestinian enclave, also mostly civilians.

Continued on Page 6



CAIRO: Jordan's King Abdullah II is received by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on Oct 19, 2023. — AFP



Kuwait FM receives newly appointed ambassadors



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday received Ambassador of Jordan Sinan Al-Majali, who submitted his credentials as a new ambassador to the country. — KUNA photos



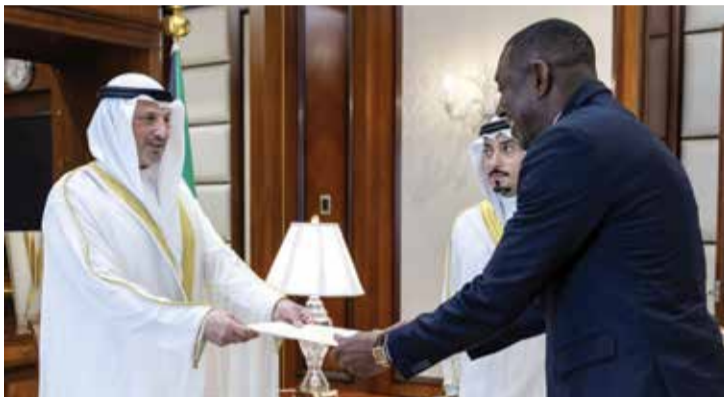
KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina Nusret Tsharshar, who submitted his credentials as a new ambassador to the country.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs received Ambassador of Hungary Andreas Sabu, who submitted his credentials as a new ambassador to the country.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs received Ambassador of Nepal Gana Shyam Iamsal, who submitted his credentials as a new ambassador to the country.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs welcomes Ambassador of Ghana Mohammad Habib Idris, who submitted his credentials as a new ambassador to the country.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs receives Ambassador of UN Secretary-General Representative Ghada Al-Taher, who submitted her credentials as a new ambassador to the country.

Foreign school in Kuwait prevents students from supporting Gaza

Students told to remove t-shirts featuring Palestinian map



KUWAIT: Schools all over the country stood in solidarity on Thursday with Palestine by raising flags and holding posters during the morning assembly. Students also held up pictures and wore the traditional Palestinian keffiyeh scarf in support of Palestine. — KUNA photos



By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: During a recent event held at a foreign school in Kuwait, both local and expatriate students chose to wear the Palestinian keffiyeh scarf as a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinian people, who have been facing tragic circumstances due to massacres by the Zionist entity in Palestine. To the students' surprise, the school administration in Hawally insisted they remove their keffiyeh

and t-shirts featuring the Palestinian map.

Alternatively, they were given the option to wear these t-shirts inside out, concealing the imagery while on school grounds. The school principal, when contacting the parents of these students, cited violations of school rules as the reason for their actions. It's important to note that the students had not engaged in any disruptive behavior; their actions were limited to wearing these items.

The irony of this situation is that it transpired during an event focused on addressing bullying, where the school aimed to educate students about respecting the rights of others, including the freedom to express themselves. Regrettably, the school administration appeared to contradict these principles in their treatment of the students.

In a related development, an MP, in a press statement, revealed that several international and foreign schools in Kuwait have similarly prohib-

ited students from wearing the keffiyeh and other symbolic clothing during special events aimed at expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people. The representative emphasized the need for schools to be held accountable for their actions and called upon the minister of education to designate every Thursday as a day for students across Kuwait to show their support for the Palestinian cause and remember the martyrs who lost their lives due to attacks by the Zionist entity.

How the watermelon symbolizes Palestinian resistance

By Passant Hisham

Nowadays, if you post any Instagram stories that support Palestine, you must have noticed the dramatic decrease in these stories' views, or even the total prohibition of posting some related content. This is due to Meta's most recent update that enforced new guidelines limiting your account from posting, sharing, commenting or liking any content about Palestine. But how is this related to watermelons?

These kinds of laws come as no surprise, as the history of such guidelines goes back to 1967, specifically after the Arab-Zionist war. It was at that point of time exactly when the watermelon ceased to be just a regular fruit for Palestinians, but became an icon of resistance that was used as an indirect way to express their silenced voices against all the odds.

That's when the Zionist government issued a similar yet more brutal law that prohibited all public displays of the Palestinian flag and its colors, which resulted in arresting anyone who gets involved in this act. So protesters decided to raise slices of watermelons high in the sky, as they share the same colors of the Palestinian flag: Red, black, white and green.

Back then, even artists were banned from creating political art about the Zionist entity, so they too decided to symbolize their protests by painting watermelons as a sign of freedom of expression and democracy. The watermelon icon was not only used in paintings, but was also printed on clothes, bags, books and even on walls, until it became one of the official acts of supporting Palestinians worldwide.

After the advent of social media, specifically in 2021,



the use of the watermelon has taken a modern approach, as Palestinian citizens and supporters started posting online images, emojis and artworks of watermelons in the hope of bypassing online censorship and content moderation that would result in deleting their posts that purely included the flag of Palestine.

In an interview with Vice magazine, Laila El-Haddad, a Palestinian born in Kuwait, shared her childhood experience with the controversy surrounding the Palestinian flag and its colors through one of her visits to Gaza. Just like every child who has a sense of belonging to their origins, she found herself innocently engrossed in drawing the picture of the flag on a piece of paper, only to find her relative forcing her to throw the drawing in the trash out of fear of the young girl getting caught by the Zionists.

Commenting on the ban on the flag, Haddad said: "It was devaluing you as a people and your history, but also your identity and erasing that identity completely. That's what it was attempting to do." If anything for sure, this short anecdote just confirms the fact that Palestinians have long suffered from being silenced and prevented even from basic means of expressing their identity. And it's obvious how this tough experience has taken many forms, from arbitrary arrests to social media censorship.

Now, every time Palestinians eat a slice of watermelon, they are hit by the bitter memories of numerous arrests, confiscation of artworks, taking down of flags, and oppression of innocent people. All of which makes it more like a reaffirmation, that this piece of fruit will always represent the existence and unwavering resistance of Palestine.

Kuwait rejects coercive eviction of Palestinians

BAGHDAD: The Kuwait National Assembly delegation participating at the 35th emergency conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has categorically rejected the coercive eviction of Palestinians in northern Gaza and the destruction rained down on civilian cities. The delegation reaffirmed Kuwait's steadfast stance on the just Palestinian cause, saying that it allows no room for neutrality or attempts to normalize ties with the Zionist entity.

Head of the Parliamentary Caucus, MP Dr. Mohammad Al-Mahan, in his speech at the conference, called for urgent communication between world parliaments to rally support for the Palestinian case. Al-Mahan indicated that the international community and the Security Council must take responsibility for civilian protection, put an end to military escalation, and allow urgent and medical humanitarian assistance to arrive immediately unblocked.

MP Fahad bin Jame', on his part, described the catastrophic situation in Palestine, saying that the Palestinians are subjected to atrocious air strikes and intensified raids, with no shelter, water, food, or electricity, and an imminent land incursion looming ahead. He stated that the occupation machine of destruction is supported by the west, the military, politically, financially, and the media, paying no heed to humanitarian values, principles of morality, or legitimacy.

MP bin Jame' called out the double Western standards in regards to the Palestinian case: their belief that Palestine has no right to defend itself, resist occupation, or live with human dignity. He added that they do not recognize the rightfulness of the cause, its

legitimacy, or its history but adopt principles of power, tyranny, autocracy, and conceit. These countries often claim belief in human rights, freedom of expression, and the right to peaceful protest, bin Jame' told the congregation, but now stand to ban pro-Palestine protests, threaten to criminalize waving the Palestinian flag, and even penalize wearing the traditional keffiyeh, dubbing it a threat to peace.

The MP pointed out the ban on content on social media platforms in support of Palestine, saying that thousands of posts are being deleted and accounts are being shut down citing publication measures, all to make room for the Zionist entity to spread its false propaganda. Bin Jame' took the opportunity to pose the question, "Where are we today from the two-state solution, from the Arab Peace Initiative, and from the right to return for Palestinian refugees?"

These peaceful endeavors made no progress, he commented, achieved nothing except augment violence and settlement policies, which allowed for destruction and blockade as the occupation rejected a Palestinian state in any shape or form. The Palestinian people find themselves let down, alone, and isolated in facing the tyranny of the enemy and its recurring aggressions amidst the silence of the international community.

The Palestinians, he stated, are no less human than others for the world to turn their back on their rights and demands and even refuse their right to resistance and self-defense. The unprecedented wide-scale operation "Al-Aqsa Flood" is the product of injustice and marginalization, he stated. Bin Jame' reasserted the right of Palestinians to defend themselves in any way available to them and called on attendees to support resilience and resistance to liberate the land and regain rights. The Kuwaiti MP called on social media influencers to mobilize their platforms to stand in solidarity with Gaza and expose the heinous Zionist crimes, saying that the truth is what the enemy fears most. — KUNA

Zain seeks to bolster national workforce in private sector

Company supports second edition of Watheefti, nation's biggest career fair



Al Khashti with Zain officials at the company's booth.



Zain showcases its leading experience in the local telecom sector.



Company keen on attracting national talents.

KUWAIT: Continuing to actively support and participate in career fairs to bolster the national workforce in the private sector, Zain today announces its main sponsorship of the second edition of Watheefti, Kuwait's biggest career gathering. The event is held at the Arena and features over 100 organizations from the local public and private sectors from all industries, and witnesses 60 workshops and panels for students, graduates, and job seekers.

The event's opening ceremony was attended by H.E. Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Adel Al Mana, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Zain's HR team, as well as top executives and officials from public and private sector organizations. Zain joins this unique gathering for the second time running to affirm its active participation in the biggest career fairs that attract students, graduates, and job seekers. By being a part of

this event, the company seeks to enrich the local job market, exchange experiences, and encourage local talents to join the private sector, which is one of the Kuwaiti economy's main pillars.

Through its dedicated booth at Watheefti, Zain showcases its HR policy and available vacancies, while introducing visitors to its wonderful workplace environment. Zain's HR team also provides a detailed explanation of the nature of work at various departments and divisions and answer any questions and inquiries visitors have. In addition, Zain uses this unique platform to introduce students and graduates to its leading experience in the local telecom and ICT sector by sharing success stories of local talents that contributed to its success as one of the leaders of the Kuwaiti market.

Watheefti is considered Kuwait's biggest career gathering and features in its second edition over 100 organizations that represent the most vibrant

industries in the market. The event also witnesses 60 interactive workshops, sessions, and panels that cover key topics related to personal and professional skills that are valuable to any new job seeker, presented by some of the best speakers and experts in their fields.

The sessions cover topics like AI's role in careers, work in the public sector vs. the private sector, leadership skills, creating a career path, preparing for job interviews, writing impactful CVs, the art of dialogue and debate, workplace cultures, building career relations, presentation and public speaking skills, and much more. In its first edition, Watheefti achieved huge success by attracting over 20,000 passionate and dedicated young people who were looking to start their new career journeys. Over 65 employers from the public and private sectors joined the event, which created a unique space for them to conduct interviews at the venue.

Viral hashtag calls on Gulf to cut oil exports over Gaza

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Social media activists in Kuwait recently initiated a hashtag campaign in solidarity with the people of Gaza who are facing water shortages imposed as a collective punishment by the Zionist entity. This punitive action is a response to the resistance efforts led by Hamas in defense of Palestinian land rights. The hashtag, "Water in exchange for oil," was launched in direct response to the policy of the Zionist entity, which has cut off essential resources like water, food, aid and gas to the Gaza Strip.

The campaign gained momentum with the sharing of past GCC statements, particularly those from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, dated from Oct 15, 1973. During this time, members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), consisting of Arab OPEC members as well as Egypt and Syria, initiated an oil embargo to pressure Western countries into compelling the Zionist entity to withdraw from the Arab territories occupied during the 1967 war.

One Twitter user, Aisha, remarked on the hashtag campaign, stating: "In the absence of armies, oil is our only weapon." Many social media users agreed with her perspective, underscoring its importance in defending the Palestinian people. Another user, Maram, shared a picture of the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and his Crown



KUWAIT: A worker walks at the Gathering Center 15 (GC 15) oil facility in the northern Al-Rawdhatain oil field, 80 Kms from Kuwait City in this file photo. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Prince, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. This image highlighted their honorable stance in support of the Arab lands occupied during the 1967 war, when an official decision was declared to cut oil exports to countries that supported the Zionist entity. "We did it before, and we can do it again," Maram wrote.

The hashtag gained traction and generated signif-

icant interaction on various social media platforms. One citizen emphasized the gravity of the situation, noting that cutting off water and electricity, blocking access to medicines and supplies, and targeting civilians and hospitals are all exceptional crimes against an entire population. He stressed the need for an extraordinary response, making it clear that supporting the hashtag's claim is a worthy idea.

best practices, and the continuous development of work systems and procedures.

He stressed that the fact that Mina Abdullah refinery received the highest risk engineering management rating in the history of the oil sector represents a milestone for the refinery and a new standard established by National Petroleum in this field to aim towards achieving the company's strategy of seeking a level of global operational excellence, promoting innovation, and developing new ideas and approaches to meet challenges.

Al-Otaibi appreciated KPC's support and cooperation to achieve this achievement, praising the efforts of all employees in the company and their keenness to develop their abilities in dealing with risks and commitment to safety and reliability to maintain a safe and sustainable work environment. — KUNA

Mina Abdullah Refinery strengthens its ranking

KUWAIT: Mina Abdullah refinery, a subsidiary of Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), has recorded the highest score in risk engineering at the level of work sites in KPC subsidiaries and the highest in the history of the Kuwaiti oil sector. The refinery received an average score of 100.5 points in the latest risk engineering field survey conducted by the American Marsh Company, specializing in risk management and providing insurance coverage, with the participation of a number of well-known international insurance companies such as AIG, SCOR, QBE, and Zurich.

With this result, Mina Abdullah Refinery has strengthened its advanced global ranking in the quality of risk engineering for the categories of energy and refining industries, according to studies conducted by Marsh Measurement Company. Comparing the quality of risk engineering for various international companies, Mina Abdullah and Mina Al-Ahmadi refineries occupied a leading position in the top quarter of the comparison when compared with more than 1,400 energy and refining facilities around the world.

Executive vice president of fuel supply operations and company spokesman Ghanem Al-Otaibi expressed pride in the refinery's achievement, especially with the increase in the level of complexity in the refinery after the operation of the environmental fuel project, indicating that reaching this level is backed by great efforts exerted by the refinery to maintain a leading approach in the refining industry.



Ghanem Al-Otaibi

Al-Otaibi explained that effective risk management is vital for any industrial facility, especially those dealing with energy resources such as refineries, where a thorough and proactive risk engineering survey helps to identify and assess potential risk areas, enabling the company to take appropriate measures to effectively mitigate them. He added that this high assessment was the result of continuous work and meticulous commitment from the refinery's management and employees to apply security and safety standards, using international



Involving parents in children's education fosters their success

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Parents' involvement in their children's education plays a crucial role in fostering their academic success and personal development, as they create a supporting and nurturing environment that encourages learning. This way parents demonstrate to their children the value of education, which motivates them to take their studies seriously and work towards setting goals and achieving them. To look more into parents' effective role in their children's education, Kuwait Times interviewed Mubarak Al-Enezi, a teacher of humanities and business.

Kuwait Times: What is the role of parents in education?

Mubarak Al-Enezi: Education is the key to success of all communities and the door of knowledge, culture and values. Only countries with vision have enthusiasm for education because they believe they cannot create their future without educated individuals with commitment, ethics and ambition. It is obvious that the education process has various theories and ways according to different aspects, but the basic key to success in education is related to the person who provides you with knowledge by using effective methods related to real life. Hence, parents and teachers have the same important role in education. In fact, it starts with the parents, as they start building the consciousness and personality of their kids in their early years of life.

Kuwait Times: Why is it important for parents to be actively involved in their children's education?

Enezi: Parents have an important role during their children's school age, same as in their preschool age. They must cooperate with teachers to supervise, provide a healthy environment of learning and find the positives and negatives in a student's performance and attitude and begin to use effective methods to help students fight attitude disorders like hyperactivity, autism and learning difficulties.

Kuwait Times: How can parents encourage a love of learning and motivate their children to engage with their education?

Enezi: Engagement is one of the effective methods to help the students learn to be responsible, believe in themselves and be confident. Also, parents should raise their awareness on the importance of education in modern life and develop skills they need to continue the journey of education.

Kuwait Times: How can parents ensure their child's physical and mental well-being in relation to their education?

Enezi: Parents must encourage students to have commitment to physical education, same as mental education. School subjects like PE have a real positive effect on mental education. It helps students to manage their time and be active, focused and healthy. It can help them discover their favorite habits, activities and types of sports, which can create future champions and athletes. In short, the process of education is a serious journey that needs commitment, responsibility and cooperation. It needs real and honest communication between educators and parents to create the path of knowledge for students.



Mubarak Al-Enezi

Minister encourages youths to search for private sector jobs

PAAET organizes exhibition of job, study opportunities



KUWAIT: Participants are pictured during the job fair. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Mane on Thursday encouraged youths to look for job opportunities in the private sector, as they are varied. This came as a remark to reporters on the sidelines of opening the sixth exhibition of job and study opportunities organized by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in cooperation with the "my job" fair, with the participation of 120 government agencies.

The minister, who is also the sponsor of the exhibition, said the event is a good chance to help fresh graduates be briefed on the labor market. The exhibition was opened with a panel discussion on "labor market and job opportunities," in which acting deputy head of manpower affairs Najat Yusuf and acting undersecretary of the Civil Service Commission Diaa Al-Qabandi participated. The partici-

pants highlighted some problems facing fresh graduates in the labor market, topped by reluctance of the private sector's jobs and being unaware of the requirements of the labor market.

They suggested some solutions, including enacting some laws that will enable researchers to become acquainted with job opportunities in the public and private sectors, duties and rights, as well as attracting global companies and establishing production lines to recruit youth. Meanwhile, Hassan Al-Fajjam, head of PAAET, told reporters that the authority is keen on holding this exhibition and seeking to create job opportunities for graduates, mainly in the private sector. He appealed to youths to become acquainted with job and study opportunities at the exhibition.

In another development, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has confirmed its keenness to reform the labor market in the country and contribute

to providing all services aimed at supporting graduates and job seekers with employment from various specialties in the private sector. The authority said in a press release that as part of its endeavor to build and refine young people and support their self-confidence, it participated in the job fair, which is the largest career gathering in the country.

PAM is providing services for those wishing to obtain career opportunities. These include providing career counseling services and professional aptitude tests, in addition to developing their cognitive skills, reviewing the training courses and professional development programs available and other things that encourage young people to engage in the labor market. The authority stated that it also seeks to open employment doors for young people in various fields in the private sector in order to achieve the New Kuwait 2035 vision. — KUNA

Kuwait trade surplus with Japan up 16.3%

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan widened 16.3 percent from a year earlier to JPY 77.8 billion (\$519 million) in September, up for the first time in six months, as exports outpaced its imports by a big margin, government data showed on Thursday. Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 15 years and eight months, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report. Overall Kuwaiti exports to Japan increased 20.1 percent year-on-year to JPY 102.9 billion (\$687 million) for the first expansion in five months.

Imports from Japan rose 10.1 percent to JPY 25.1 billion (\$168 million), up for the 17th month in a row. The Middle East's trade surplus with Japan narrowed 42.4 percent to JPY 73.4 billion (\$5.9 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region sliding 32.0 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and other natural resources, which accounted for 94.9 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, plunged by 32.5 percent.

The region's overall imports from Japan increased by 19.4 percent on demand for automobiles, machinery, and manufactured goods. Japan's global trade balance returned to surplus for the first time in three months at JPY 62.4 billion (\$417 million) in September on the back of strong demand for automobiles and lower energy bills.

Exports grew 4.3 percent from the year before, buoyed by robust sales of cars, auto parts, and medicine. Imports declined 16.3 percent as energy prices, especially crude oil, LNG, and coal, shrank. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. — KUNA

Kuwait supports Belt and Road Initiative

TOKYO: The Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Dr Khaled Mahdi, said on Thursday that Kuwait was keen on supporting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), indicating that his country was one of the first to join from the Middle East. Kuwait seeks to develop the logistical infrastructure and include it in Kuwait Vision 2035 through a program to develop the Northern Economic Zone and an establishment to develop Silk City and Kuwaiti islands.

This came in the Secretary-General's speech to the third high-level forum of the BRI held in the Chinese capital of Beijing. Dr Khaled Mahdi said that the main principles of BRI matched Kuwait Vision 2035 and its development plans and agendas, as this coherence is considered a key to success for the participating countries. Developing the necessary infrastructure to achieve communication and interconnection between the economies of the participating countries is a top priority, seeking to



BEIJING: Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi speaks at the forum.

make the initiative successful and achieve its noble goals, he said.

He noted that this development is based on several foundations, such as investing in the infrastructure of aerial, land and sea transportation in the participating countries, encouraging trade exchange, joint investment and supporting national development plans, in addition to exchanging knowledge and experiences in the fields of innova-

tion, creativity and economics.

He added that these foundations were framed in the meeting of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with Chinese President Xi Jinping last September, which resulted in the signing of seven important agreements in the fields of developing marine and land infrastructure, renewable energy and waste management, green economy and circular carbon economy. — KUNA



Scan & Subscribe KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



AAW offers job opportunities

KUWAIT: Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) announced that it will offer great job opportunities at Watheefti, Kuwait's largest career fair, taking place at The Arena in 360 Mall from October 19 to October 21. AAW's participation in this career fair aims at attracting young talents, including students and fresh graduates looking for job or training opportunities, to help them explore the job market's offerings.

AAW Chief Human Resources & Administration Officer, Ahmad Boursli said: "At AAW, we offer great job opportunities for young talents looking to build world-class careers in Kuwait's dynamic retail sector. Our company enjoys a diverse and multicultural work environment, with a workforce of over 3,000 employees from different countries, working across seven different sectors. We proudly represent more than 200 global brands and operate more than 100 retail stores throughout Kuwait. Our par-

ticipation in Watheefti today comes in line with our dedication and commitment to empowering young talents, helping them in building their careers in the retail sector and contributing to its future growth."

AAW has a strong and ongoing commitment to empowering the youth and inspiring young professionals to explore opportunities across various fields. The company supports numerous youth-related initiatives, including INJAZ-Kuwait, a nonprofit organization that equips students with the essential skills to grow and excel in the private sector.

AAW has two recruitment booths at Watheefti, one representing AAW corporate and the other representing Joe & The Juice, the renowned Danish cafe, specialized in healthy food and beverages. During the exhibition, the company will be able to connect with job seekers, accept applications, and discuss job opportunities available at the company's headquarters and at the cafe. Over 100 companies from various sectors are participating in Watheefti. The career fair will feature over 60 workshops, panel discussions, and career counseling sessions by specialists in various fields, to help job seekers build their professional paths and plan for their future careers.



Venezuelan migrants deported on first charter plane from US

Washington in limbo as House marks 15th day without speaker

Page 6

Page 7



RAMALLAH: Mourners carry the flag-draped bodies of two Palestinian youths killed in confrontations with settlers and Zionist forces the previous night on Oct 19, 2023. — AFP photos

Death toll mounts in West Bank

At least 850 Palestinians detained by Zionist occupation forces since Oct 7

RAMALLAH/HEBRON: Zionist forces killed nine Palestinians Thursday in multiple incidents across the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said. At least 73 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Zionist forces or settlers since the ongoing escalation in the decades-long Zionist occupation of Palestine October 7, according to the ministry.

The latest fatalities were seven Palestinians killed during an attack on Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm in the northern West Bank, the ministry said. The Zionist occupation forces had imposed a "tight military siege" on the camp where it "banned movement, raided and ransacked homes, and bulldozed streets," according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

"A large occupation army force, accompanied by military bulldozers, stormed the camp from various sides and raided dozens of homes while vandalizing them. ... The occupation bulldozers destroyed sections of the main street of the camp and a monument at its entrance, as well as many side streets," said Wafa in a statement.

During confrontations early Thursday morning between young Palestinian men and the occupation soldiers, who fired live bullets, a young Palestinian boy, Taha Mahameed, 16, was shot and killed. Three others were injured and transferred to the hospital in Tulkarm, according to Wafa.

The assault continued later in the afternoon as "occupation forces set up military checkpoints at the main intersections of Tulkarm city and

prevented the movement of people and cars." "With no ambulances allowed in, residents said the wounded were smuggled out of the camp and rushed to the hospital in Tulkarm in private cars," said Wafa. The Palestinian Red Crescent said its medics treated 25 people in Nur Shams, the majority for gunshot wounds. "Ambulances are being detained by occupying forces with injured people inside," the organization said in a statement. The Zionist military did not immediately comment on the Nur Shams fatalities when contacted by AFP. Troops were "continuing to operate in the camp to thwart terror activity", an army statement said.

Zionist raids across Palestine

In separate incidents, the Palestinian health ministry said Zionist forces shot dead a 17-year-old in Dheishah refugee camp, near Bethlehem, and a 32-year-old in Budrus to the west of Ramallah. In Budrus, the Zionist occupation military said people "hurled Molotov cocktails and other objects at the forces", burned tires and trash cans, prompting soldiers to shoot at them.

Zionist occupation forces detained Thursday morning 41 Palestinians during a raid at the southern West Bank city of Hebron, and a similar number detained during raids at several towns and villages in the Ramallah governorate, while 50 workers from the Gaza Strip who were kicked out of Zionist-controlled areas and were staying in Dheishah refugee camp in Bethlehem were also rounded up, among



Palestinians demonstrate against the Zionist occupation in the streets of the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah on Oct 19, 2023.

others detained elsewhere in the occupied territories. Four others were also detained during the raid at Dheishah refugee camp. Two Palestinians were also detained in Tubas, in the north of the West Bank, where confrontations broke out and several people were shot and injured by army gunfire. The Palestinian Prisoner's Society said the

Zionist entity rounded up at least 120 Palestinians, not including the Gaza workers, the highest number since Oct 7, which included lawmakers, civic leaders, former prisoners, and journalists. It said the Zionist entity detained at least 850 Palestinians since the start of the aggression on Gaza on Oct 7. — Agencies

Pakistan court grants bail to ex-PM Sharif

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistan court granted bail Thursday to former prime minister and graft convict Nawaz Sharif, removing the threat of arrest when he returns to the country from self-imposed exile this weekend, his lawyer said.

After nearly four years in the United Kingdom, Sharif is hoping to lead his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party through elections scheduled for January 2024. The court's decision allows him to return to his political heartland of Lahore on Saturday for a welcome home rally, while his primary opponent Imran Khan languishes in jail. "It's a new beginning," PML-N chairman Raja Muhammad Zafar-ul-Haq told AFP. "His return is poised to be a momentous development."

Sharif's lawyer Anjad Pervaiz told AFP the Islamabad High Court granted him protective bail until October 24 meaning "he can not be arrested on his arrival" in Pakistan. Sharif has been prime minister three times but was ousted in 2017 and given a lifetime disqualification from politics after being convicted of corruption.

He served less than a year of a seven-year sentence before getting permission to seek medical care in the United Kingdom, ignoring subsequent court



ISLAMABAD: A car drives past a welcoming poster of Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif along a street in Islamabad on Oct 19, 2023. — AFP

orders to return during former prime minister Imran Khan's government.

Politicians in Pakistan are often tangled in legal proceedings that rights monitors say are orchestrated by the powerful military, which has ruled the country directly for more than half of its history and continues to enjoy immense power. Nawaz's fortunes changed when his brother Shehbaz Sharif came to power last year and his government oversaw changes to the law, including limiting the disqualification of lawmakers from contesting elections to five years.

Sharif's return has likely been smoothed by a deal between the military establishment and his party to prevent significant legal hurdles, said analyst Zahid

Hussain. "There was some sort of arrangement with the military establishment, without that he wouldn't have decided to come back," he told AFP. The caretaker government — in place until elections — has previously denied any such agreement. The PML-N party, one of the two dynastic parties of the country that frequently swap power, is planning a massive rally through the streets of Lahore on Saturday.

'Lion of Punjab'

The PML-N has touted Sharif as a safe pair of hands to steer a spiraling economy suffering from rampant inflation. But analyst Hussain said "it's challenging to definitively determine whether his popularity remains intact". "His foremost challenge lies in building party credibility, especially in light of the substantial support Imran Khan has garnered, primarily from the youth," he added. "He will need to undertake a process of reinvention."

Even though he was outside the country, Sharif was widely believed to have been pulling the strings of his brother's premiership. Known as the "Lion of Punjab", he is a political survivor who has repeatedly roared back to the country's top office. He has served three terms — but did not complete any of them.

His first, beginning in 1990, ended in 1993 when he was sacked for corruption. The second lasted from 1997 to 1999, when he was deposed in a military coup. He blamed the security establishment for again targeting him in 2017, when the Supreme Court disqualified him from politics for life over graft allegations he denies. Prior to his return, he has tempered his anti-army stance. — AFP

103,000 incidents of hate speech against Palestinians on X: NGO

HAIFA: Hate speech and incitement in Hebrew targeting Palestinians on social media is on the rise, said the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media (7amleh) in a statement to Wafa, the Palestinian state media agency. The Haifa-based center is a non-profit organization aimed at enabling Palestinian and Arab civil society to effectively utilize the tools of digital advocacy.

7amleh has documented over 103,000 instances of hate speech and/or incitement in Hebrew out of 120,000 posts collected between Oct 7 to 18 using their recently developed "Violence Indicator". Most of these instances were found on "X", which is allowing the spread of harmful content without sufficient moderation.

7amleh said 63 percent of the documented instances of hate speech and incitement were based on political affiliations and/or nationalist sentiments, and 34 percent were rooted in racist bias. The remaining instances included gender-based and religious violence, among others.

7amleh recently developed the "Violence Indicator," a linguistic model that uses artificial intelligence technology to automatically and immediately monitor the spread of hate speech and violence on social media platforms in Hebrew targeting Palestinians. The findings are then presented on "7or - the Palestinian Digital Rights Violations Observatory". — Agencies

International

Washington in limbo as House marks 15th day without speaker

Jim Jordan fails to win House speakership in second vote

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers rejected hard-line conservative Jim Jordan's bid for speaker of the House of Representatives for a second time on Wednesday, as the leadership vacuum paralyzed Washington for a 15th day with no clear resolution in sight.

The lower chamber of Congress has been in a tailspin since Republican speaker Kevin McCarthy was ousted by his party's far right on October 3 — leaving it unable to address a looming government shutdown or war in the Middle East. Jordan, an acolyte of scandal-engulfed Donald Trump, could only afford to lose four Republican votes, but 22 of his colleagues rejected his candidacy in the second ballot — two more than were against him a day earlier.

The Zionist attack on Gaza, a renewed push for aid to Ukraine and the threat of a government shutdown have dramatically upped the stakes, with Republicans hoping the urgent need for Congress to respond would unite the fractured party. But Jordan's centrist colleagues, already wary of his hard-right politics, voiced irritation over a concerted effort to whip extra votes for the 59-year-old former wrestling champion. "Each day that passes without a speaker of the House is a national security risk," said Jordan supporter and California Republican David Valadao.

"I voted for the Republican Conference's nominee for speaker because we must get back to work, and we cannot do that until we have a speaker." Jordan's second defeat compounded the angst over Republican disarray, prompting a growing group of lawmakers — including Valadao — to push for the limited powers of the current, largely ceremonial caretaker speaker to be expanded. But Jordan showed no signs of dropping out, as his spokesman Russell Dye vowed to reporters that the congressman would "keep going," with the next round expected on Thursday.

No clear alternative

Jordan's tally of 199 votes marked the first time in a century that the majority's nominee had dipped under 200. The powerful Judiciary Committee chairman will be expected to show significant improvement in the third round of voting, yet the holdouts appear to be dug in.

His Republican opponents met after voting against him for the first time Tuesday and nearly all reaffirmed their objections, with some predicting Jordan would only hemorrhage more support. The Ohio lawmaker has little of the goodwill among the rank-and-file that his predecessor



WASHINGTON: A general view shows House of Representatives vote on a new Speaker of the House at the US Capitol on Oct 18, 2023. — AFP

spent years cultivating, and it is unlikely that he would be allowed the 15 rounds of voting that it took McCarthy to get elected.

Party strategists worry that Jordan going backwards could herald days of further deadlock, as there is no obvious alternative with the support and the profile to corral a party that has become synonymous with division and dysfunction. "Why run for the mayor of a city that's just been nuked?"

asked online politics outlet Punchbowl News. There is momentum behind a push to formally appoint caretaker speaker Patrick McHenry for a limited period of two or three months — expanding his purely ceremonial powers so that he can bring legislation to the floor.

Democratic Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries did not publicly commit to backing the move as he headed to a party meeting after voting, although

he has not ruled it out. "We had two objectives coming into this meeting. First objective, to stop Jim Jordan ... Second objective is to reopen the House," he said. But Scott Perry, chairman of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, said empowering McHenry would be "a vote to keep you broke, and Washington broken." "I told you — no matter what — I won't vote for the status quo, and I'm keeping my word," he posted on X. — AFP

Russia slams 'dangerous' US policy on N Korea

SEOUL: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with North Korea's Kim Jong Un on Thursday, after slamming US policy towards the nuclear-armed state as "dangerous". Lavrov hailed North Korea as a "close neighbor and long-time partner" in a meeting that lasted a little over an hour, Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The veteran envoy's two-day visit is expected to lay the groundwork for a trip to the country by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was invited by Kim last month at a high-profile summit in Russia's far east. Earlier in the day, Lavrov lashed out at what he termed a "dangerous" US policy towards North Korea while touting the "new, strategic level" of relations between Moscow and Pyongyang.

"Like our North Korean friends, we are

seriously worried about the intensification of military activity of the United States, Japan and South Korea in the region and by Washington's policies," Lavrov told journalists, according to Russian news agencies. "We oppose this unconstructive and dangerous line," he said, adding that the United States was placing "strategic infrastructure, including nuclear elements", in the region, without elaborating.

In the face of a record-breaking series of weapons tests by Pyongyang this year, Seoul has moved to strengthen its security relationship with traditional ally the United States while entering a trilateral defense arrangement that also includes Japan. Seoul and Washington have staged joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and US strategic assets, while an American nuclear-armed submarine in July made a South Korean port call for the first time in decades.

A B-52 bomber capable of carrying a nuclear payload currently sits at Cheongju airport, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Seoul, marking the first time one has landed in the country since at least

2000. Local media reports said this week that the bomber would take part in a joint aerial drill near the Korean peninsula on Sunday that would involve South Korea, the United States and Japan.

But North Korea's relationship with Russia has also been tightening, Lavrov said Thursday. "After the landmark summit ... we can say confidently that relations have reached a qualitatively new, strategic level," Lavrov reportedly told North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui at a meeting.

Moscow is also keen to assist North Korea with its energy needs, a constant source of struggle for heavily sanctioned Pyongyang, he told Russian outlets. "There is geological exploration, there are also plans for the supply of energy resources and other goods that our friends from the DPRK need," Lavrov said, using the acronym for North Korea's official name. Both energy issues would be discussed at a joint meeting slated for November, he added.

Lavrov, who laid wreaths at monuments to former North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in the morning, arrived in



PYONGYANG: This handout picture released by the Russian Foreign Ministry on Oct 19, 2023 shows Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. — AFP

Pyongyang on Wednesday night after accompanying Putin on a trip to Beijing. At a welcome dinner, he praised Pyongyang's support for Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. "We highly value your principled, unambiguous support for Russia's actions in connection with the special military operation in Ukraine," Lavrov was quoted as saying by Russia's RIA Novosti news agency.

Kim travelled to Russia last month aboard a specially built bullet-proof train for a face-to-face meeting with Putin, declaring bilateral ties with Moscow his country's "number one priority". The two leaders met at Russia's Vostochny Cosmodrome, roughly 8,000 kilometers from Moscow, a location seen as symbolic given North Korea's space aspirations. — AFP

Palestinians await aid trucks; Sunak...

Continued from Page 1

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said there needed to be "rapid, unimpeded humanitarian access" after dire warnings about the impact of the Zionist blockade. "We need food, water, medicine and fuel now. We need it at scale and we need it to be sustained, it is not one small operation that is required," he added.

The emergencies director of the World Health Organization (WHO), Michael Ryan, said aid needed to get in "every day", calling an initial 20 trucks — the deal struck by Biden with the Zionist entity and Egypt — "a drop in the ocean of need right now". Gaza has been hit by a relentless barrage of Zionist fire in retaliation for a Hamas attack on Oct 7.

Zionist bombing since has killed at least 3,785 Palestinians, most of them civilians, according to the health ministry. Entire city blocks have been levelled, displacing more than one million of the 2.4 million population, the UN has said. "The pace of death, of suffering, of destruction... cannot be exaggerated," said UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths. There are fears of worse to come if the Zionist entity launches an anticipated ground invasion to destroy Hamas and rescue Zionist and foreign hostages, whose known number the Zionist entity on Thursday revised up to 203.

Medics, students stand in...

Continued from Page 1

that killed hundreds and injured hundreds more. He renewed Kuwait's strong condemnation of such escalation. In the light of this violation, the international community needs to avoid double standards in implementing the humanitarian law against

On the Gaza side of the Rafah border, scores of people were again waiting, desperate to flee but careful to keep at least 100 m away in case of new Zionist bombardment. "We're ready with our bags," said one man who gave his name only as Mohammed, 40, and said he works for a European institution. He said he had been waiting "for three days with my family, in a house 10 minutes away from the crossing" but had received no information so far. Majed, 43, who said he works with a German organization, told AFP: "I came on my own this morning and, in case the crossing opens, I'd get my wife and children — they're ready."

Biden, who was due to address the nation on Thursday about the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, announced the aid deal after what he called "blunt" talks in the Zionist entity and a phone call with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. The Zionist entity consented to the deal while pressing on with its military campaign. Its army reported Thursday that it had destroyed hundreds more Hamas targets, including a missile launch site and tunnels, and that "more than 10 terrorists were eliminated".

The Zionist entity has stressed it must destroy Hamas after the worst attack on its soil which, the army said Thursday had claimed 1,403 lives since the surprise onslaught on Oct 7, including at least 306 soldiers killed in battles to reclaim overrun villages and kibbutzim. Biden, the first US president to visit the Zionist entity during war time, strongly backed the Zionist entity but warned it not to overreact, cautioning that Washington made mistakes as it sought to avenge 9/11. — AFP

the Zionist aggression force, he said. Human rights are always a priority for Kuwait, as its constitution states, said Daikan. The country has also established several human rights-related institutions as part of Kuwait's commitment to international agreements.

Meanwhile, Daikan noted that the National Assembly had approved establishing a committee for women, children and families affairs in June, a step towards developing human rights. He also spoke of equality between the genders, as Kuwait enabled women to engage in leading positions, including becoming MPs. — KUNA

Egypt, Jordan slam 'collective...

Continued from Page 1

A siege imposed by the Zionist entity has deprived the territory's 2.4 million people of food, water, electricity and fuel as the United Nations warns of an increasingly dire humanitarian situation.

Sisi and King Abdullah warned of regional spillover. "If the war does not stop", it would threaten "to plunge the entire region into catastrophe", according to the Jordanian statement. The pair had been due to hold talks with US President Joe Biden and Palestinian presi-

dent Mahmoud Abbas in Jordan this week, but Jordan cancelled the meeting after a deadly strike on a Gaza hospital. Their meeting comes on the same day that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is expected in Cairo.

In a meeting with UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in Cairo on Thursday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry discussed "the priority of delivering humanitarian and emergency aid to the people of Gaza", according to the foreign ministry. Sisi also discussed "the situation in Gaza" with US Central Command chief Michael Kurilla, his office said Thursday. Egypt and Jordan were the first Arab states to normalize relations with the Zionist entity, in 1979 and 1994 respectively, and have since been key mediators between Zionist and Palestinian officials. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Protesters stage a demonstration in support of a ceasefire in Gaza in the Cannon House Office Building on Oct 18, 2023. — AFP

International



HARLINGEN: Migrants board the first plane departing undocumented Venezuelans from the United States to Venezuela.



HARLINGEN: A woman in shackles is patted down before boarding the first deportation flight of undocumented Venezuelans in Harlingen, Texas, on Oct 18, 2023. — AFP photos

Venezuelan migrants deported on first charter plane from US

New US-Venezuela deal provides 'orderly, safe and legal repatriation'

MAIQUETIA: Some 130 Venezuelan migrants arrived in Venezuela Wednesday on a chartered plane from the United States on the first such deportation flight following an agreement between the two non-friendly governments. The flight from Texas arrived at the Simon Bolivar International Airport in Caracas, bearing adult men and women traveling alone, no families.

"The individuals on this flight ... range from those who have just entered our borders unlawfully to those that have been in the country a while and committed criminal acts," US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) official Corey Price told reporters before the flight's departure from Texas. "This flight to Venezuela is the first I've seen in my career of an entire charter flight of Venezuelans going back to their

country, and we plan on having several more of these in the coming days and weeks."

Until the agreement this month between the White House and President Nicolas Maduro — whose 2018 reelection Washington does not recognize — Venezuelan migrants were deported on commercial flights, small numbers at a time mixed in with ordinary passengers. This was the first plane since the deal that was chartered for the sole purpose of returning a large group of migrants to Venezuela. The agreement provides for the "orderly, safe and legal repatriation" of undocumented Venezuelan migrants.

The dozens on Wednesday's first flight climbed the steps to the plane one by one, with chains on their ankles and wrists that were removed once on board. All wore face masks, their meager belongings packed

into white and orange plastic bags. They had been earmarked for "expedited removal," after the deal with Venezuela, and were being "removed within a matter of days and weeks, as opposed to years like you've seen in the past," said Price. One passenger fell ill during boarding and was evacuated by ambulance, officials said, to be repatriated at a later date.

'Just the beginning'

President Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate for re-election in 2024, is under pressure from Republicans, and some in his own party, over the problem of illegal migration to the United States, mainly from Latin American countries.

The problem has persisted despite the barbed wire fence erected by Texas on its border with Mex-

ico, and the soldiers deployed there. The administration recently offered protection from deportation to 472,000 Venezuelans to allow them to obtain residence and work permits within 18 months — although this would apply only to those who arrived before July 31 this year.

Biden has vowed to limit the separation of migrant families, a practice that was common under his predecessor Donald Trump. Price said the United States sends migrants back home, mainly to Central and South America, on about 70 flights every week. US Border Police chief Jason Owens urged would-be migrants to use legal pathways. "These are the consequences for entering our country unlawfully," he said. "This is just the beginning. Our intent is to increase these flights." — AFP



BRUSSELS: A protester holds a portrait of Mahsa Amini during a demonstration in her support in front of the Iranian embassy in this file photo. — AFP

EU awards rights prize to Iran's Mahsa Amini

STRASBOURG: The European Union on Thursday awarded its top rights honor, the Sakharov Prize, to Mahsa Amini, the Iranian Kurdish woman who died in Iranian custody a year ago, and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement her death triggered. "The brutal murder of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini marked a turning point. It has triggered a women-led movement that is making history," European Parliament speaker Roberta Metsola said, using Amini's Kurdish first name as she announced the award. Metsola said the movement's three-word slogan was "a rallying cry for all those standing up for equality, for dignity, and for freedom in Iran". The EU prize announcement comes two weeks after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to an imprisoned Iranian rights campaigner, Narges Mohammadi.

Amini died age 22 on September 16, 2022, while being held by Iran's religious police for allegedly breaching the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. Her family and supporters say she was killed. Iranian authorities claim she died in custody from a previously undisclosed medical condition. Her death triggered mass protests in Iran. It also generated a global movement known as "Woman, Life, Freedom", calling for the end of Iran's imposition of a headscarf on all women and an end to the Muslim cleric-led government in Tehran.

Iranian security forces have cracked down on the protests domestically, killing hundreds, and have executed dozens for allegedly participating in what officials have called "riots". This week, they jailed Amini's lawyer, Saleh Nikbakht, for one year for "propaganda" after he spoke to media about her case. Many Iranian women continue to defy the government's clothing edict by taking off their headscarves in public.

Defying Iran's clerics

The "Woman, Life, Freedom" campaign continues in cities around the world, with frequent demonstrations in which Amini's photo is held aloft. Mohammadi's Nobel Peace Prize was in recognition of her fight against the mandatory headscarf in Iran and against the oppression of women in the country. Together, the two prizes focus attention on Iranian authorities' punishment of women who defy the headscarf order, seen by both sides as defiance of the Islamic republic's system of governance itself. Amini and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement were backed by the European Parliament's three main political groups, making them the frontrunner well before the Sakharov Prize winner was announced. — AFP

Myanmar communities forced to live among piles of Western trash

YANGON: In a working-class neighborhood of Myanmar's Yangon, plastic waste is piled a meter high, the toxic product of what a recent investigation said is rampant dumping of Western trash. For several years sites across Shwepyithar township have been filling up with trash that chokes fields, blocks the drainage of monsoon rains and causes fire risks. The trash is the runoff of global plastic production, which has more than doubled since the start of the century to reach 460 million tons per year.

"In the past, during the rainy season I could pick watercress from this field to eat," one resident told AFP, asking not to be identified for security reasons. "Because of the plastic waste, now we can't get any watercress to eat. Instead, we get a smell."

An investigation released by collaborative newsroom Lighthouse Reports and six partners has found some of the waste dumped here comes from the West. The mix includes wrapping and containers for products ranging from Danone yoghurt to Polish company Spomlek's cheese. Items from German-owned UK supermarket Lidl and pasta packaging from Canada's Unico have also been found. None of these originated in Myanmar, but they have ended up there despite a law prohibiting the import of plastic waste unless it is clean and ready to recycle.

The ban was imposed after China stopped accepting foreign plastic waste in 2018. Several local

recycling factories admitted to Lighthouse Reports that waste they can't process is often dumped or burned. AFP contacted several of the companies whose products were found in Myanmar to ask how they might have arrived. Lidl's press office told AFP the company was "disappointed" by the findings. "All our plastic waste is processed in the UK and Lidl has a strict policy against sending waste or recyclables to any country in Asia," it said in a statement. "We are therefore naturally disappointed to see this and will be investigating."

Porous border

Just how the waste enters Myanmar, and in what quantities, is unclear. The investigation suggests Thailand is a key passage for illegally exported plastics. According to United Nations Comtrade data, most of Myanmar's plastic waste imports come from Thailand. Almost 7,500 tons entered in 2021, the last year it reported figures. But the roughly 2,400-kilometre (1,490-mile) border the countries share is extremely porous and crossed with ease by traffickers and smugglers. Officials on both sides of the border do little to inspect arriving waste, Lighthouse Reports said.

"The data collected is often out of date, and there's no check on that data," said Willie Wilson, former vice chair of Interpol's Pollution Crime Working Group, referring not just to Comtrade but all trade data. "We're left with this fog of mis-declared, missing data. It's a license to hide in plain sight."

In July Myanmar's junta said there was a \$1.639 billion difference between what Thailand said it exported to Myanmar, and what Myanmar said it imported from Thailand. The yawning discrepancy "might be caused by illegal trade", its Illegal Trade Eradication Steering Committee said. — AFP



YANGON: Plastic waste is seen covering the ground in Yangon's Shwepyithar township. — AFP

10% of dolphins killed as Amazon drought hits lake

RIO DE JANEIRO: An estimated 10 percent of the dolphins in a picturesque lake in the Brazilian Amazon were killed in a week as a record drought and searing temperatures devastate the region, researchers said Tuesday.

Emergency teams found 153 dolphins dead in the last week of September in Lake Tefe, where water temperatures reached 39.1 degrees Celsius, more than seven degrees higher than the normal maximum, according to the Mamirau Institute for Sustainable Development (IDSM) and environmental group WWF-Brazil.

The lake is located in the drought-hit northern state of Amazonas, at the spot where the Tefe river empties into the Amazon, in the heart of the world's biggest rainforest. Researchers reported 130 pink dolphins and 23 tucuxi dolphins killed. Both are listed as species with declining populations by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Huge numbers of fish have also died off, they said.

"What's happening in Lake Tefe is staggering. The impact of losing these animals is enormous and affects the entire local ecosystem," said Mariana Paschoalini Frias, conservation specialist at WWF-Brazil. "Dolphins are considered 'sentinels.' They're indicators of the health of their environment. What's happening to them is reflected in other species, as well, including humans," she said in a statement.

Besides killing fish and dolphins, the drought has dramatically reduced river levels, devastating a region that relies on its labyrinth of waterways

London police trial facial recognition to target shoplifters

LONDON: British police revealed Thursday that officers are piloting contentious facial recognition technology to catch prolific shoplifters, as stores suffer increased thefts and violence. London's Metropolitan Police, the UK's biggest force, said the trial of the emerging tech had shown it could revolutionize how they tackle an array of offences.

It follows police forces in Britain and beyond increasingly deploying facial recognition software, which civil rights campaigners argue is open to racial, gender and other biases. The Met's use of the tech to target shoplifters comes as UK businesses appeal for government and other help to tackle the fallout from a surge in theft and violence towards staff.

It has been blamed on the impact of the pandemic and Britain's worst cost-of-living crisis in decades. Shoplifting offences recorded by police in England and Wales have risen by a quarter in the past year, Office for National Statistics (ONS) data released Thursday showed. "We're working with shops across the capital to target and track down criminals in a way we never have before," Met Commissioner Mark Rowley said in a statement announcing the facial recognition trial.

The Met asked a dozen retailers to provide images of 30 of the worst shoplifting offenders for the pilot, which began in August. They were compared against the force's own custody shots, and of 302 images submitted, 149 came up as positive matches.

The software uses biometric measures of an individual's face and works even if part of their face is covered, taking around a minute to find a match. Officers are now investigating further in the hope of building criminal cases against some of the suspects. "The results we've seen so far are game-changing," said the Met's Rowley. "The use of facial recognition in this way could revolutionize how we investigate and solve crime."

Rowley noted the scale of business crime in London is "huge" and that the trial had shown that "career criminals involved in serious crime" were involved in shoplifting. He added the data and information used in facial recognition tech helps officers "focus our efforts in an even more precise way". — AFP

for transportation and basic needs. The federal government has sent emergency aid to the stricken region, where normally bustling riverbanks have turned to eerie, desiccated landscapes dotted with stranded boats.

Experts say the Amazon dry season has been worsened this year by the El Nino warming phenomenon. Environment Minister Marina Silva has also blamed "uncontrolled climate change." In state capital Manaus, located at the junction of the Amazon and Negro rivers, authorities reported the water level at the city's port reached its lowest level in 121 years Tuesday, hitting record low for the second straight day.

The Negro's water level stood at 13.49 meters (44 feet), the lowest since records began in 1902, port officials said. Heavy smoke from forest fires has also engulfed Manaus in recent days, forcing the cancellation of the city's marathon last Sunday. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

Nokia to cut up to 14,000 jobs

Nokia expects an 'improvement in network businesses in the fourth quarter'

HELSINKI: Finnish telecom giant Nokia said Thursday it would cut up to 14,000 jobs as profits fell on weakening demand for its 5G equipment in North America. The announcement adds to a series of layoffs in the tech industry following a boom during Covid pandemic lockdowns.

"In the third quarter we saw an increased impact on our business from the macroeconomic challenges," CEO Pekka Lundmark said in a statement. Nokia's savings program is expected to reduce staffing to as low as 72,000, cutting costs by up to 1.2 billion euros (\$1.14 billion) by 2026, the company said. The program targets business areas Mobile Networks, Cloud and Network Services and corporate functions. "The most difficult business decisions to make are the ones that impact our people," Lundmark noted.

Nokia reported that its profits reached 133 million euros in the third quarter, a 69 percent drop from the same period a year ago. "The earnings were much weaker than expected and the outlook is more uncertain. So it's not looking that good in the short term for Nokia," Atte Riikola, an analyst at equity analysis firm Inderes, told AFP.

Despite the uncertainty in the third quarter, Nokia said it expects an "improvement in our network businesses in the fourth quarter." But Riikola believed that Nokia's "estimates will come down pretty dramatically." "There's a possibility for a negative profit warning," he added.

Locked in a competition for 5G networks with Swedish rival Ericsson and China's Huawei, Nokia's sales dropped by 20 percent to 4.98 billion euros in the third quarter of 2023. Nokia had hoped that its 5G rollout in India would compensate for a slowdown in spending by North American telecom operators this year, but was faced with a disappointment.

"We saw some moderation in the pace of 5G deployment in India which meant the growth there was no longer enough to offset the slowdown in North America," Lundmark said. Shorthand for fifth-generation mobile technology, 5G holds the potential to enable lightning-fast video downloads and innovations like high-speed autonomous vehicles. But due to the global economic downturn, both Nokia and Ericsson have reported a slowdown in investment by mobile network operators this year. Like numerous tech firms, Nokia's profitability got a boost during the COVID-19 pandemic but is now forced to cut jobs as the industry experiences a slowdown.

Nokia's announcement follows tens of thousands of job cuts across the tech sector this year. British telecom group BT said in May that it will axe up to 55,000 jobs by the end of the decade. Tech giants Meta and Microsoft have revealed plans to reduce their workforce by as many as 10,000 employees this year. In January, online retail giant Amazon announced it was cutting over 18,000 jobs worldwide and Google parent company Alphabet announced cuts of around 12,000 people. — AFP



BARCELONA: File picture shows Nokia's new logo at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, in Barcelona. Nokia said that it would cut up to 14,000 jobs as profits fell on weakening demand for its 5G equipment in North America. — AFP

Amazon to expand drone delivery into Britain, Italy

SEATTLE: Amazon on Wednesday said it hopes to expand drone delivery into Britain and Italy by late next year, as it unveiled new warehouse robots and tech in its race to get shoppers what they want quickly. The Seattle-based e-commerce colossus said it will expand drone delivery of certain purchases to a third US state as well as to the two European countries by the end of 2024. Amazon delivery drones are already at work in California and Texas, and a new MK30 model will be able to operate in more extreme weather conditions than those currently in use, Amazon Prime Air vice president David Carbon said during a marketing event.

"Our customers have always wanted things faster and I think this is a way we can get to it at scale," said Prime AI director of engineering Jason Patrao, adding that the drone program, while currently small, "is going to be something that I think we will all get used to." Amazon has also installed a new robotics system called Sequoia in one of its Texas logistics centers, the company said.

The system features automated vehicles, gantry cranes, mechanical arms, computer vision technologies and ergonomic workstations for employees, a presentation showed. Amazon already uses 750,000 robots in its warehouses, but the idea is to make the various machines more interoperable, according to executives. "It becomes magical when you

blend multiple robotics systems with our amazing people," said Amazon Robotics chief technologist Tye Brady. Sequoia can identify and put away stock in warehouses "up to 75 percent faster" than was previously possible, the company said in a statement.

And order processing time can be reduced by 25 percent in best-case scenarios. "This means we can list items on sale on Amazon.com more quickly, benefitting both sellers and customers," Amazon said. Traditional brick-and-mortar stores still account for about 80 percent of retail business, but sales are likely to shift more online the more such immediate gratification through fast delivery becomes available, analysts said.

"The better they get at delivery, the more it continues to grow the e-commerce market overall and Amazon's place within that market," said Insider Intelligence analyst Andrew Lipsman. The popular online shopping platform became a lifeline for many during the pandemic, but since this year it has been facing a new kind of competition from Chinese e-commerce apps.

Fashion retailer Shein and especially Temu, which offers beauty products, homeware and electronics, have won over many consumers with their low prices. "Given how aggressively Temu is trying to compete with Amazon and the money they seem to be willing to spend on logistics and getting cheap goods to people, I'm sure Amazon has some level of concern," Lipsman said.



SUMNER: Amazon's new MK30 Prime Air drone is displayed during Amazon's "Delivering the Future" event at the company's BFI Fulfillment Center, Robotics Research and Development Hub in Sumner, Washington. — AFP

Jobs versus robots

Without specifying whether jobs would be lost through the use of robots, Amazon emphasized the gains in terms of safety, sparing workers from repetitive tasks and even creating jobs. "Over the past ten years, we have installed hundreds of thousands of robotic systems while creating hundreds of thousands of jobs," the group stressed.

"We think that the repetitive, the mundane work that people do, we do see that shifting more to robotics," said Scott Dresser, vice president for Amazon robotics. "There's also an opportunity to make things safer, when people (are) bending and lifting heavy objects, when people are walking miles in the fulfillment center," he said.

Amazon, the second-largest em-

ployer in the US, just behind Walmart, will also be testing android-like machines from Agility Robotics to carry plastic bins. "There's about a million unfilled logistics, manual labor jobs" in the United States currently, said Agility cofounder Damion Shelton. "The problem is not that you're even taking a job... The problem is there's no person to even do the work," he said.

But increased productivity via robots won't fix underlying Amazon worker issues, critics say. "It's not going to change their logic. And their logic is 'use these workers up and throw them away,'" said Sheheryar Kaosji, executive director of the Warehouse Worker Resource Center, a nonprofit dedicated to improving warehouse industry conditions in southern California. — AFP

Google plans to make flagship Pixel 8 in India

NEW DELHI: Google plans to manufacture its flagship Pixel 8 smartphone in India, CEO Sundar Pichai said Thursday, joining a growing list of global tech companies limiting their supply chains' dependence on China.

Pichai's announcement follows US tech rival Apple's release last month of its latest iPhone, including units made in India, as tech giants target the South Asian nation's fast-expanding market and abundant supply of cheap skilled labour. "We shared plans at #GoogleforIndia (event on Thursday) to manufacture Pixel smartphones locally and expect the first devices to roll out in 2024," Pichai said on X, formerly known as Twitter. Pichai added that Google appreciated the "support for Make in India"—a flagship policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, offering faster business clearances and financial incentives for manufacturing goods in the country.

New Delhi has ramped up its production and exports of mobile phones and other electronic goods since the scheme was introduced. India's mobile phone exports almost doubled to \$8.5 billion year-on-year in 2022-23, according to official figures.

Google senior vice president Rick Osterloh said the firm sees "an even greater opportunity to make Pixel smartphones available to more people" in India. "In recent years, India has established itself as a truly world-class hub for manufacturing, resulting in a thriving environment for businesses to flourish," Osterloh said in a statement.

The company intended to "start with the Pixel 8, and will partner with international and domestic manufacturers to produce Pixel smartphones locally", he added. India, home to the second-highest number of smartphone users after China, has set a target of producing about \$300 billion worth of local electronics and smartphones by 2025-26. Google already has significant investments in the country and also partnered with Reliance Jio, owned by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, on a 4G-enabled, low-cost smartphone for the local market. — AFP

Honda, GM plan driverless taxis in Tokyo in 2026

TOKYO: Japan's Honda and US auto titan General Motors announced on Thursday that they planned to launch a driverless taxi service in Tokyo in 2026, helping tackle labor shortages in an ageing society. Co-developed by San Francisco-based self-driving car operator Cruise, the project will offer "an entirely new kind of mobility experience" in Japan, Honda said in a statement.

"This will be a major step toward the realization of an advanced mobility society," its chief executive Toshihiro Mibe said. The project is also aimed at "helping address societal issues facing Japan, such as the taxi and bus driver shortage", Honda added.

Autonomous vehicles are being pushed by Japan's government as the country battles a rapidly ageing population and persistent labor shortages. In 2020, Japan became the first country in the world to allow a vehicle capable of taking full control in certain situations to operate on public roads.

Auto giants from Toyota to Nissan are also trialling self-driving buses and taxis. Honda's newly announced service will feature a "vast cabin space" capable of accommodating six passengers, stripped of a driver's seat and a steering wheel.

It will "pick up customers at a specified location and drive them to the destination, entirely



TOKYO: This undated handout photo released by Honda Motor on October 19, 2023 shows Cruise Origin, a driverless vehicle. Japan's Honda and US auto titan General Motors said October 19, 2023 they plan to launch a driverless taxi service in Tokyo in 2026, helping tackle labor shortages in an ageing society. — AFP

through self-driving", with customers able to complete the whole process on a smartphone app, according to Honda.

"Dozens" of the driverless cars are expected to be launched in Tokyo in early 2026, with the developers then hoping to expand the project to a fleet of 500, and to areas outside central Tokyo. "The benefits of AVs (autonomous vehicles) -- from safety to

accessibility—are too profound to ignore," Mary Barra, chair and CEO of GM, said.

But self-driving cars are no stranger to controversy, with safety under scrutiny as operators including Cruise increasingly gain traction in California. Honda, GM and Cruise aim to establish a joint venture dedicated to their new initiative in 2024, pending regulatory approvals. — AFP

Indonesia central bank increases rates to combat weak currency

JAKARTA: Indonesia's central bank hiked its key interest rates Thursday to their highest levels in four years in an unexpected move to defend the rupiah's value amid growing global economic uncertainty. Bank Indonesia raised the seven-day reverse repurchase rate by 25 basis points to six percent, its highest since June 2019. Its two other main rates were also raised by 25 basis points. "This increase is aimed at reinforcing the policy of stabilizing the exchange rate of the rupiah due to the heightened global uncertainty," said Bank Indonesia Governor Perry Warjiyo in a press briefing. "It is also a preemptive and forward-looking measure to mitigate its impact on imported material inflation".

The central bank aims to keep inflation between two and four percent this year, and between 1.5 and 3.5 percent in 2024, he said. The rupiah has outperformed regional peers against a strengthening US dollar, but has nonetheless lost value, hitting 15,800 rupiah per dollar on Thursday, its lowest level since April 2020. The weakening currency may force the government to raise fuel prices, given the country imports half of its petroleum. "While the hike is needed, the rate hike might trigger credit slowdown and affect domestic consumption," said Bhima Yudhistira, an economist from the Center of Economic and Law Studies. — AFP

EU opens disinformation probes into Meta, TikTok

Commission seeks details about how TikTok was complying with rules on protecting minors online



TOULOUSE: File picture shows a screen displaying the Meta logo and the European flag. The EU announced probes on October 19, 2023, into Facebook owner Meta and TikTok, seeking more details on the measures they have taken to stop the spread of "illegal content and disinformation" after the Hamas attack on Zionist entity. — AFP

BRUSSELS: The EU announced probes Thursday into Facebook owner Meta and TikTok, seeking more details on the measures they have taken to stop the spread of "illegal content and disinformation" after the Hamas attack on Zionist entity.

The European Commission said it had sent formal requests for information to Meta and TikTok respectively in what is a first procedure launched under the EU's new law on digital content. The EU launched a similar probe into billionaire mogul Elon Musk's social media platform X, formerly Twitter, last week.

The commission said the request to Meta related "to the dissemination and amplification of illegal content and disinformation" around the Hamas-Zionists conflict. In a separate statement, it said it wanted to know more about TikTok's efforts against "the spreading of terrorist and violent content and hate speech".

The EU's executive arm added that it wanted more information from Meta on its "mitigation measures to protect the integrity of elections". Meta and TikTok have until October 25 to respond, with a deadline of November 8 for less urgent aspects of the demand for information.

The commission said it also sought more details about how TikTok was complying with rules on protecting minors online. The European Union has built a powerful armoury to challenge the power of big tech with its landmark Digital Services Act (DSA) and a sister law, the Digital Markets Act, that hits internet giants with tough new curbs on how they do business.

The EU's fight against disinformation has intensified since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year and Russian attempts to sway European public opinion. The issue has gained further urgency after Hamas' assault on October 7 on Israel and the aftermath which sparked a wave of violent images that flooded the platforms.

The DSA came into effect for "very large" platforms, including Meta and TikTok, that have more than 45 million monthly European users in August. The DSA bans illegal online content under threat of fines running as high as six percent of a company's global turnover. The EU's top tech enforcer, Thierry Breton, sent warning letters to tech CEOs including Meta's Mark Zuckerberg, TikTok's Shou Zi Chew and Sundar Pichai of YouTube owner Alphabet.

Growing EU fears

Breton, EU internal market commissioner, told the executives to crack down on illegal content following Hamas' attack. Meta said last week that it was putting special resources towards cracking down on illegal and problematic content related to the Hamas-Zionist conflict. On Wednesday, Breton expressed his fears over the impact of disinformation on the EU. "The widespread dissemination of illegal content and disinformation... carries a clear risk of stigmatization of certain communities, destabilization of our democratic structures, not to mention the exposure of our children to violent content," he said.

AFP fact-checkers have found several posts on Facebook, TikTok and X promoting a fake White House document purporting to allocate \$8 billion in military assistance to Zionist entity. And several platforms have had users passing off material from other conflicts, or even from video games, as footage from Zionist entity or Gaza.

Since the EU's tougher action on digital behemoths, some companies, including Meta, are exploring whether to offer a paid-for version of their services in the European Union.—AFP

Nestle sales falter, outlook unchanged

ZURICH: Nestle reported on Thursday a drop in sales volume as the Swiss food giant hiked prices in the face of inflation, but the group confirmed its outlook for the year. The company—whose brands range from Nespresso capsules to Purina pet food to Gerber baby products—said sales fell 0.6 percent in terms of volume in the January-to-September period from a year earlier. Revenue reached 68.8 billion Swiss francs (\$76.6 billion) -- 0.4 percent lower than the same period last year due to the strength of the Swiss currency. Its organic sales growth—which excludes currency fluctuations and acquisitions—rose 7.8 percent as the company raised prices but it was below expectations.

"Growth was driven by pricing as we continued to navigate historic inflation levels," Nestle chief executive Mark Schneider said in an earnings statement. The recovery of sales volume was "underway", he added.

The company confirmed its outlook for 2023, with organic sales growth between



seven and eight percent. Consumer goods companies have raised prices across the world as inflation has remained elevated despite interest rate hikes by central banks.

Nestle has slowed its prices increases as they reached 8.4 percent over the nine-

month period after rising by 9.5 percent in the first six months of the year. "There comes a time when shoppers will start to say enough is enough when it comes to price rises and Nestle has woken up to that realization," said Susannah Streeter, analyst at UK investment service firm Hargreaves Lansdown.

"The cost-of-living crisis has been swirling for two years, and now with consumer budgets increasingly battered, its understandable more shoppers are switching to cheaper products," Streeter added. Nestles will remain resilient, however, thanks to its diverse range of products, she said.

Andreas von Arx, analyst at brokerage firm Baader Helvea, said Nestle's latest earnings "reflect the challenging environment and uncertainty on the consumer outlook." "On the positive note, we also do not see any major new negative surprises," he said, adding that he expects volume growth to "clearly improve" in the fourth quarter. Nestle shares fell more than 2.3 percent in early afternoon trading on the Swiss stock


Taiwan's TSMC reports profit drop in Q3

RAIPEI: Taiwan's TSMC on Thursday said profit fell by a quarter in the third-quarter, but said demand was picking up for its advanced semiconductors needed for cutting-edge AI applications. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the world's largest contract microchip maker, controls more than half of the world's output of chips used in everything from smartphones to missiles.

The company said net profit decreased 24.9 percent on-year in July-September to Tw\$211 billion (\$6.5 billion), while revenue fell 11 percent to Tw\$546.7 billion. "The AI demand continues to grow stronger and stronger. From the TSMC point of view, we have

a capacity limitation to support the demand," chief executive CC Wei said in an earnings call. "We are working hard to increase the capacity to meet their demand." Demand for high-performing chips has been robust, with companies building the hardware needed for AI to flourish in the wake of the successful launch of ChatGPT.

But the chip industry faces uncertainty from high inflation and sluggish global economic growth caused in part by geopolitical tensions. The United States on Tuesday said it was tightening curbs on exports of state-of-the-art AI chips to China. The new rules beefed up measures taken a year ago that banned the sale to China of microchips that are crucial to the manufacturing of powerful AI systems. Replying to a question on the impact of the new export curbs, Wei said the company was still doing an assessment. "So far we can tell you that the impact to TSMC is limited and manageable at least for the short term." —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 19 OCTOBER 2023

(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	858	892	913	848	65	32,068,580	38	4.45%	-13.12%	860	895	13.0	1.69	3.8%	1.03
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	254	254	262	248	14	40,592,701	0	0.00%	-15.06%	253	256	12.7	1.18	3.7%	1.30
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	152	154	160	150	10	43,771,162	2	1.32%	-14.04%	151	160	16.0	0.58	2.4%	1.13
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	172	171	177	168	9	8,137,907	-1	-0.58%	-18.01%	170	176	17.3	0.66	4.5%	1.35
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	711	720	745	703	42	86,088,440	11	1.55%	-3.77%	715	725	17.8	1.84	2.3%	1.17
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	601	598	611	590	21	13,070,767	-2	-0.33%	-20.57%	593	618	36.9	2.40	0.9%	1.21
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	122	131	135	120	15	5,743,264	9	7.38%	-13.82%	129	133	9.3	0.60	3.8%	1.83
204	National Investments	Financial Services	213	217	222	201	21	9,998,979	4	1.88%	-8.44%	214	220	169.5	0.98	13.0%	1.99
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	113	113	119	111	8	20,505,251	-1	-0.88%	0.89%	110	116	28.3	0.66	0.0%	0.99
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	165	174	177	157	20	16,948,133	9	5.45%	54.33%	172	186	33.0	1.30	2.3%	1.14
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	155	155	159	147	12	42,017,310	1	0.65%	16.54%	151	158	9.1	1.11	4.8%	1.66
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	59.3	57	59.3	56	3.2	6,262,009	-2.0	-3.39%	-23.90%	55.5	57.1	NM	0.36	15.8%	1.31
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	161	166	167	158	9	24,076,991	5	3.11%	58.31%	158	166	15.3	1.18	1.8%	1.08
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	835	832	859	831	28	2,480,276	-3	-0.36%	4.00%	825	838	17.4	1.86	1.6%	1.07
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	100	99.8	102	98.5	3.5	16,178,091	1.3	1.32%	3.94%	99	102	18.2	0.62	2.9%	0.62
501	National Industries	Financial Services	204	200	209	200	9	26,480,747	-2	-0.99%	-3.23%	194	201	141.8	0.95	2.4%	1.60
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,100	1,114	1,129	1,071	58	4,056,768	9	0.81%	-8.31%	1,090	1,149	12.4	1.03	5.4%	1.06
506	HEISCO	Industrials	721	756	765	714	51	1,835,978	35	4.85%	23.33%	753	769	22.4	1.96	2.6%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	670	646	670	640	30	3,681,039	-19	-2.86%	-19.25%	640	677	12.1	1.38	9.3%	0.94
603	Agility	Industrials	516	524	539	510	29	13,307,372	9	1.75%	-27.22%	520	533	19.5	0.71	0.0%	1.54
605	Zain	Telecommunications	464	489	508	455	53	36,236,132	26	5.62%	-13.14%	480	503	10.1	1.71	7.0%	0.64
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,150	3,100	3,250	3,081	169	899,430	-50	-1.59%	-7.53%	3,100	3,160	9.1	3.77	12.0%	0.65
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	164	168	168	163	5	538,589	1	0.60%	-17.24%	167	171	NM	0.73	0.0%	1.18
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,479	1,430	1,480	1,405	75	855,727	-23	-1.58%	-24.74%	1,405	1,485	16.6	9.94	5.5%	1.50
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	77.7	77	78.2	75.1	3.1	21,464,354	-1.2	-1.54%	1.05%	76.6	79.0	8.7	0.93	6.2%	1.36
821	Warba Bank	Banking	180	184	188	177	11	18,852,379	4	2.22%	-19.35%	177	188	26.0	1.00	1.6%	1.13
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	491	498	515	480	35	3,241,279	1	0.20%	26.72%	490	519	73.5	1.47	2.4%	0.46
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	454	447	477	442	35	6,038,413	-6	-1.32%	20.81%	445	458	36.1	1.86	3.2%	0.69
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	178	178	180	175	5	1,152,034	0	0.00%	-5.32%	176	180	14.4	1.61	6.7%	0.43
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,760	1,738	1,808	1,652	156	1,097,224	-23	-1.31%	-15.30%	1,700	1,770	22.2	6.14	4.9%	0.92
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,070	1,057	1,099	1,050	49	4,920,833	-3	-0.28%	31.30%	1,033	1,069	12.0	3.73	6.5%	0.64

* As of end of week closing

US to ease Venezuela oil, gas sanctions after election deal

Washington renews trading in Venezuelan debt securities on secondary market

WASHINGTON: The United States will ease some oil and gas sanctions against Venezuela after the South American country's government and opposition agreed to hold elections next year. In response to those "democratic developments," the US Treasury Department "has issued General Licenses authorizing transactions involving Venezuela's oil and gas sector and gold sector," and is "removing the ban on secondary trading" in debt securities, a statement from undersecretary for terrorism Brian Nelson said Wednesday.

But it also said that those authorizations could be amended or revoked at any time if the electoral deal falls through. "Let's turn the page, let's rebuild a relationship of respect, of cooperation... this is my message to those in power, and to the government of the United States," Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said, while also calling for a definitive end to the sanctions.

To uphold the agreement, the United States warned Venezuela that it must "define a specific timeline and process for the expedited reinstatement of all candidates" by the end of November, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"All who want to run for president should be allowed the opportunity," he said in a statement. The agreement between Washington and Caracas comes just a day after the Venezuelan government and opposition reached a deal in



INT JAMES, BARBADOS: Colombia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alvaro Leyva (right), talking with Venezuela's deputy of the National Assembly, Nicolas Maduro Guerra, son of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, during a meeting in Barbados. Venezuela's government and opposition will restart talks seeking to end the country's political and economic crisis, after a nearly year-long suspension. — AFP

Barbados — mediated by Norway — to hold elections in late 2024.

But that accord allows for the exclusion of certain candidates under Venezuelan law, which would include opposition frontrunner Maria Corina Machado. US officials speaking on the condition of anonymity on Wednesday evening,

however, said they believed Caracas was planning to eventually allow such candidates to participate.

Blinken said "failure to abide by the terms of this arrangement will lead the United States to reverse steps we have taken." Later in the day, five jailed opposition figures were released, according

to a social media post by Gerardo Blyde, who represents the opposition in talks with the government.

Among them were journalist Roland Carreno and former lawmaker Juan Requesens, imprisoned in 2018 after an attack on Maduro. Also on Wednesday, a charter flight from Texas arrived at Simon Bolivar International Airport in Caracas carrying about 130 Venezuelan migrants, the first such deportation flight following an agreement earlier this month between the two countries. The deal provides for the "orderly, safe and legal repatriation" of undocumented Venezuelan migrants, who until now had been deported in small numbers on commercial flights, mixed in with regular passengers.

Oil, gas, gold

In concrete terms, the sanctions easing means the US government is re-authorizing the purchase of Venezuelan oil and gas for a period of six months, which may be renewed "only if Venezuela meets its commitments under the electoral roadmap as well as other commitments with respect to those who are wrongfully detained."

Regarding the gold sector, no time limit has been specified, with the Treasury Department stating it seeks to reduce black market trading. Washington is also allowing renewed trading in Venezuelan debt securities on the secondary

market, although the ban on the primary market — meaning debt securities newly issued by the Venezuelan government — remains in force.

The easing of sanctions on Venezuelan oil had been eagerly awaited by the markets, leading to a fall in the price per barrel despite the war between Zionist entity and Hamas and the risk of escalation in the Middle East.

An exact election date will be defined by the country's National Electoral Council, according to the text of the deal. The two sides had resumed talks seeking to end the country's political and economic crisis, after a nearly yearlong suspension.

The opposition, backed by several countries including the United States, did not recognize Maduro's 2018 re-election in a vote widely dismissed as fraudulent. The following year, Washington ramped up sanctions against Caracas first imposed in 2015 over the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

But the energy crisis sparked by Russia's war on Ukraine saw renewed global efforts to solve the crisis in Venezuela, which has the world's largest oil reserves. Last year, US delegates went to Caracas to meet Maduro, even though Washington does not recognize him as a legitimate leader.

After initial talks between the government and the opposition, Washington granted a six-month license to US energy giant Chevron. — AFP

News in Brief

Deutsche Bahn sells Arriva

FRANKFURT: German rail operator Deutsche Bahn said Thursday it had agreed to sell UK subsidiary Arriva, operator of red double-decker buses in London, to a US infrastructure fund in order to focus on domestic business. Deutsche Bahn said in a statement that the I Squared Capital investment group would buy "the whole of Arriva group, including all of its operating businesses across 10 European markets". No financial details were disclosed, but German media have valued the deal at around 1.6 billion euros (\$1.7 billion). "For us, the agreed sale is an important step to focus even more on additional growth in rail transport in Germany," said Deutsche Bahn's chief financial officer Levin Holle. "At the same time, the sale to I Squared will give Arriva new options to support its growth potential, for example for the future electrification of European fleets," he added. The sale comes as state-owned Deutsche Bahn is investing heavily in upgrading Germany's aging rail network. Deutsche Bahn acquired Arriva in 2010. Arriva runs rail and bus services across Britain and also operates in nine other European countries including the Netherlands, Spain and Italy. The group employs around 35,000 people, according to the statement. — AFP

Renault shares fall

PARIS: Shares in French auto giant Renault sank on Thursday as the group's third-quarter sales performance disappointed investors. Sales grew 7.6 percent to 10.5 billion euros (\$11 billion) as a drop in volume was offset by price increases for its vehicle lineup. The company has moved to a strategy of selling fewer cars but at higher prices. Renault confirmed its outlook for 2023, with cash flow equal or above 2.5 billion euros and an operating margin of between seven and eight percent. "We have entered the last quarter with confidence and confirm the improvement of our profitability in the second half of the year and beyond," chief financial officer Thierry Pieton said in a statement. But investors were not impressed as company shares fell more than seven percent in morning trading in the Paris stock exchange. Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg had expected sales growth of 10.77 percent. — AFP

Tokyo shares drop on ME crisis

TOKYO: Tokyo stocks tracked Wall Street lower Thursday on worries that the battle between Zionist entity and Hamas could spill over into a wider regional conflict. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 1.91 percent, or 611.63 points, to 31,430.62, while the broader Topix index slipped 1.36 percent, or 31.18 points, to 2,264.16. The dollar stood at 149.72 yen against 149.93 yen in New York late Wednesday. "A broad range of shares faced selling pressure as investors' caution strengthened. US yields climbed on the back of the escalation of the Middle East situations," IwaiCosmo Securities said. Meanwhile, worries over earnings of semiconductor-related businesses also weighed on sentiment. IwaiCosmo added. A sell-off across other Asian markets discouraged bargain-hunting in Tokyo, the brokerage said. Global investors will be keeping an eye on Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell's speech in New York later Thursday, hoping for some clues about the bank's plans for interest rates. — AFP

Tesla quarterly results disappoint as discounts bite

NEW YORK: Tesla's results for the third quarter missed analyst estimates on Wednesday, as the Elon Musk-run company was hit by higher costs and the fallout from price discounts. The Texas-based electric vehicle giant said sales in the July to September period reached \$23.35 billion, lower than the \$24.19 billion forecasted by analysts polled by Factset.

The company also saw net profits come in less than hoped for, at 66 cents per share instead of 73 cents forecasted. Musk has undertaken multiple price cuts throughout 2023 on vehicles, telling investors in April that the company has taken the view that pushing for higher sales is the right choice versus taking a bigger margin.

The move came as more EVs from legacy car-

makers like General Motors and Ford are hitting dealerships. But those rivals have been punished by a major strike in the United States, something that Tesla will not have to navigate. The price cuts have made investors nervous and Tesla's share price slid more than seven percent in the last month and was down more than three percent from its last closing price in after-hours trade.

The Tesla stock valuation however still dwarfs other US car makers and it has more than doubled in 2023, comforting Musk's position as one of the world's two richest people. Also rattling nerves, Tesla reported earlier this month that its new auto deliveries fell in the third quarter to 435,059 units because of downtimes at factories in Shanghai and Austin.



Elon Musk

Pakistan state airline grounds dozens of flights over fuel bills

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's embattled national airline carrier this week cancelled dozens of domestic and international flights because it could not afford to pay its fuel bills, officials said Wednesday. State-run Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), long accused of being bloated and poorly run, has found funds drying up as the government struggles with a balance of payments crisis caused by crippling debt repayments.

Athar Awan, a deputy spokesman for PIA, said 48 international and domestic flights were cancelled on Tuesday and Wednesday "due to non-availability of fuel". "The reason for the disruption in fuel supply is non-payment of dues because PIA is facing a financial crisis and cannot pay the dues to Pakistan State Oil on time," a PIA official speaking on condition of anonymity told AFP.

Decades of mismanagement and instability have hobbled Pakistan's economy, and this year Islamabad was forced into yet another bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avert default. The interim government has said it will sell off the airline as part of a wider privatization plan for state-run companies.

"The process of privatization for the national air-



line should be made more transparent and expedited to prevent further financial losses to the national exchequer," caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said in a statement last week. A senior official at Pakistan State Oil (PSO) said the state-owned fuel supplier was "providing fuel for only flights that PIA has prioritized". He, too, was speaking on condition of anonymity. PIA had agreed this week to pay the oil firm 100 million Pakistani rupees (around \$360,000) every day to cover its dues, the PSO official said.

"On Wednesday PSO received a payment of 150 million rupees in return 26 flights were refuelled", the official added. In a statement, the airline said it

expected normal service to resume from Thursday, after it paid for fuel "from its own resources".

The airline did not provide further details. Bloomberg has previously reported that PIA had liabilities of 743 billion rupees (around \$2.5 billion), exceeding its total assets by five times. PIA came into being in 1955 when the government nationalized a loss-making commercial airline, and enjoyed rapid growth until the 1990s.

The airline's reputation was also battered by a series of strikes, hijackings and accidents — including the crash of an Airbus in Karachi in May 2020 that killed 97 passengers and crew. — AFP

Country Garden denies founder flees China as default looms

BEIJING: Chinese property giant Country Garden denied Thursday its founder and chairwoman had fled the country, as the debt-saddled builder flirts with a default that could send shockwaves through the industry. One of China's biggest developers, Country Garden has racked up debts estimated at 1.43 trillion yuan (\$196 billion) as of the end of 2022.

Unverified reports in Chinese financial media this week claimed founder Yang Guoqiang and his daughter Yang Huiyan — the company's chairwoman — had left China. But the firm quashed the speculation Thursday, saying "the founder... and the group's chair of the board of directors are currently working normally inside the country".

"This rumour was posted with ulterior motives on multiple online platforms, causing a negative impact," the firm said in an online statement. "We... reserve the right to take legal action over malicious

rumours," it added. Yang Huiyan took over as chair of Country Garden in March after her father stepped down from his position on the board. But her company is now on the frontlines of China's property crisis that has seen a string of debt-laden builders either defaulting or threatening to do so.

Bloomberg News reported last month that the billionaire boss of beleaguered builder China Evergrande — which defaulted in 2021 — was being held by police. Country Garden was due Wednesday to repay \$15.4 million in interest but had not given an official indication of whether it had done so by Thursday.

Sales slump

Multiple news outlets, citing bondholders and anonymous sources, reported that the company had missed the deadline, putting it at risk of default. Country Garden did not immediately respond to an AFP request seeking confirmation of the missed payment. But the firm told Bloomberg on Wednesday that it "expects that it won't be able to meet all of its offshore payment obligations on time".

It blamed its struggles on "a deep correction in China's home market and its subdued sales".

Country Garden had 148 billion yuan in cash as of the end of June but it said it intends to use that to complete unfinished housing projects whose units were sold in advance, a common business model in China's property sector. The country's real estate industry boasted decades of soaring growth that buoyed thousands of companies and became a major source of employment. Today, construction and real estate account for around a quarter of gross domestic product.

But authorities are now on edge as the creeping debt crisis fuels buyer mistrust, sends home prices plummeting and threatens to infect other sectors. Official figures released Thursday showed that prices of new homes fell in September in 54 out of 70 benchmark cities compared to the previous month.

Year-on-year, prices were lower in 45 out of the 70 surveyed cities, despite a slew of official measures this year to shore up the ailing market. China's economy grew a forecast-beating 4.9 percent in the third quarter, official data showed Wednesday. The expansion adds to a series of broadly positive recent readings, indicating a period of stability after months of weakness following the abolition of strict zero-Covid health curbs. — AFP

Business



Al-Ablani with the NBK team.

NBK revolutionizes career fairs in Kuwait by introducing AR technology

Job seekers at ‘Wathefti’ tried simulation through NBK VirtuGate

KUWAIT: In line with its firm conviction that building a dynamic and agile workforce is pivotal for driving future business growth as well as promoting a sustainable economy, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to actively participate in different local career fairs, the most recent of which was the “Wathefti Career Fair”, which is the biggest career fair in Kuwait.

NBK has also made great strides throughout the year to establish a workforce that represents the communities, and build a diverse, inclusive, and supportive work environment driven by its corporate culture and core values.

Commenting on this, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said, “We are pleased to participate as the platinum sponsor in “Wathefti” the biggest career fair in Kuwait and a major event to attract Kuwaiti talents and professionals needed to sustain the bank’s growth and innovation.”

“NBK is increasingly adopting a digital approach in attracting, evaluating and developing graduates, integrating new technologies, tools and thinking into this process. Through this, we are approaching this particular target group in a way that is relevant to their lifestyle,” he explained.

Al-Ablani went on to say that within its digital transformation plans, it has automated many process including some steps of recruitment and on boarding process in cooperation with Talent Acquisition team.

“At Group Human Resources, our strategic priorities are to build a bank that is always ready for the future through many tools and plans that are being implemented, including introducing a new comprehensive concept for workforce management in order to respond to customers’ changing needs and foster corporate culture among employees,” he noted.

On her part, Gadeer Al-Kooheji, Talent Acquisition Manager, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: “This year, NBK’s participation represents a unique experience making a difference in the concept of recruitment by making it more dynamic and suitable for the Millennials at our pavilion through NBK VirtuGate using Augmented Reality (AR) technology to provide an experience that fully simulates the work environment at NBK HQ.”

“Our priorities are to maintain Kuwaitization rate, and pursue our commitment to expand in attracting and retaining local

Al-Ablani

- The bank is increasingly embracing a digital approach in attracting and developing graduates in a way that is relevant to their lifestyle.
- We introduced a comprehensive workforce management concept to respond to customers’ changing needs and promote our corporate culture.

talent in a sustainable way, aligning with New Kuwait Vision 2035,” she mentioned.

“The physical, mental, and financial well-being of our workforce are key elements of a thriving work environment. In managing our workforce, NBK carefully builds our Group Human Resource Management system elements and organizational culture to acquire, develop, engage and retain talent, thereby promoting service excellence, as well as business resilience and agility,” she added.

A revolution in the world of recruitment

During its participation in the fair, NBK presented a new concept that represents a revolution in the world of recruitment, as Group Human Resources employees at NBK’s Pavilion approached the participating youth and showed them an image simulating work environment at the bank’s HQ using Augmented Reality (AR) technology and 3D glasses. This technology will take job applicants in a tour that perfectly simulates NBK’s work nature, and familiarize them with the various departments and divisions, work environment, as well as restaurants, fitness gym, and clinic.

Technological advancement and digitalization transformation in all operations and businesses are among NBK’s key strategies, so it always seeks to use cutting-edge technologies. NBK introduced a new and innovative way to apply for a job by only scanning a QR code and filling out the information digitally, thus minimizing paperwork and submission of CV by hand to Group Human Resources.

Reflecting its role as trailblazer of digital transformation in the Kuwaiti banking sector, NBK’s participation in this fair underscores its dedication to provide innovative digital solutions in the banking sector to ensuring a modern banking experience for all and deliver advanced, innovative banking services.

“More Than a Workplace”

Reflecting its firm belief that employees

are its most valuable resource, NBK mainly focuses on supporting employees and improving their physical and mental health. In this context, and to foster a healthy work environment, NBK provides a fitness gym equipped with the latest exercise equipment, which is open for employees, before, after and even during working hours for their convenience, aligning with the bank’s initiatives to raise health awareness and promote a healthy lifestyle.

NBK also provides a variety of entertainment options at its HQ, as well as a well-equipped clinic managed by Wara Hospital, which provides medical check-ups, tests, and on-site visits by specialized doctors, as well as frequent awareness sessions to raise employees’ awareness on various topics related to physical and mental health.

Furthermore, NBK provides many programs and activities focusing on employee well-being and care, and promoting a healthy lifestyle. It also allows flexible working hours and paternity leave, during which the new father is allowed to stay at home to bond with the newborn child.

World-class work environment

NBK is one of the few Kuwaiti organizations that enjoy a unique workplace environment that is comparable to international peers by continuously providing exceptional career development opportunities to its employees. This includes training programs and practical experience, which aim to help them develop their skills and expertise to be qualified leaders of developing the banking sector in the future.

The bank also harnesses all its enormous capabilities towards developing its employees, and always seeks to unlock their creativity to go to the extra mile and achieve excellence, thus paving the way for employees’ career growth and taking on leadership positions in the future, as well as achieving outstanding results through perseverance and dedication.

Moreover, NBK provides a work envi-

Al-Kooheji

- NBK enjoys a unique work environment raising the slogan “More Than a Workplace” to foster employee well-being.
- Our participation represents a unique experience that will make a difference in the recruitment concept by making it more dynamic and suitable for the Millennials.



AR technology at NBK’s booth.

ronment fostering cooperation and teamwork among all employees, which is always the main driver of the bank’s successes and high-quality banking services that is comparable to international peers.

Attracting national talent

NBK is an employer of choice that offers equal opportunities and embraces diversity in the workplace. In addition, NBK’s recruitment strategy is based on attracting, training and developing the young national cadres through the best-in-class programs to help them build a successful career that qualifies them to take on future leading roles in the bank. This makes NBK the private sector employer of choice for Kuwaiti fresh graduates.

Given its leading position in the banking sector, NBK continues to attract high-caliber talent to join it. It also stands out as the largest Kuwaiti private sector employer of national manpower, as well as having the highest retention rates of Kuwaiti employees.

NBK not only provides job opportunities at a leading local and regional financial institution, but also a promising and sustainable career path.

NBK also launched NBK Academy in 2008, which aims to pave the way for fresh Kuwaiti graduates to join the bank by providing them with an introductory program to qualify them for the banking business. After joining NBK, new recruits take mandatory training courses designed to support the bank’s comprehensive strategy to foster digital mindset.

All these endeavors reflect NBK’s firm belief in the importance of delivering on its CSR in attracting, recruiting and upskilling national talent in order to prepare qualified leaders for the future. This is NBK’s mission and unshakable values maintained over long years.

It is worth mentioning that NBK annually sponsors many career fairs for the Kuwaiti youth to introduce to them suitable job opportunities that meet their aspirations, reflecting its constant commitment to nurture the young national talent and qualify them for the labor market. The bank also provides consistent support to all career fairs that help the youth and fresh graduates in finding the right job.



NBK’s booth at the Wathefti Career Fair.



NBK’s booth



NBK HR team presents a detailed explanation of employment chances at the bank.

Lifestyle



A worker builds the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.



Pieces of wood used to build the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano are inspected at Steinway & Sons Factory.



A worker builds the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.



A worker builds the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.



Pianist Lang Lang poses as he performs during the unveiling of the "Steinway x Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano event at Steinway Hall New York. - AFP photos



Workers build the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" pianos at Steinway & Sons Factory.

For classical star Lang Lang, musicians must 'bridge' cultures

Lang Lang, one of the world's most influential classical artists, says that musicians must always act as a "bridge" between cultures, but even more so during times of crisis. Speaking to AFP after an intimate performance at the Steinway piano showroom in Manhattan, the 41-year-old renowned pianist said "every musician is an ambassador for their own culture." "When you're a performing artist you play a lot of different works from different parts of the world, and it's almost like a bridge, bridging the cultures," he said. "I think every musician has the responsibilities to share the different heritage through their music."

Born in northeastern Shenyang in 1982, the globe-trotting performer became famous playing the great romantic composers. He's brought that sensibility to Disney, as the entertainment conglomerate that revolutionized the animation industry celebrates its 100th anniversary. Lang Lang last year released an album of songs based on Disney classics — "The Disney Book" — as well as a companion special that's streaming on Disney+.

And recently he introduced a "Steinway X Disney" limited edition piano handpainted with the likeness of Mickey Mouse. Lang Lang said a benefit of partnering with Disney is bringing more classical music to the ears of young people. "A lot of the time people ask me to play 'Frozen,' to play 'Can You Feel The Love Tonight,'" he said, citing themes from the



A worker inspects the frame of a "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.

animated classic "The Lion King" and the more recent phenomenon about a kingdom trapped in perpetual winter.

He said part of his goal is to make versions of those popular songs "exceptional" and in the mold of "Chopin or Liszt — this level of piano that romantic composers will do." Lang Lang said the "deep emotion" that music can evoke allows it to "unite people's hearts." "Music is quite powerful," he said. "When you listen to music, you get a lot of different types of

feelings. Whether it's happy, whether it's sad, or sentimental, in a way that you get a whole world, a range of emotions."

He also lauded the power of live performance, which for years was set back by the coronavirus pandemic, saying that artists performing onstage is "kind of like visual art and performing arts combined." "Whether it's moving hands or moving the body and facial expression, it's very moving in a way," he continued. "A great performance al-



View of a partially built "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.



A worker builds the "Steinway X Disney: Mickey Mouse Limited Edition" piano at Steinway & Sons Factory.

ways moves your heart." Asked if he had any concern over AI — whose use in music has been the subject of controversy and debate throughout the industry, with some pointing to copyright abuses — Lang Lang brushed off the concern. "It's not easy to create another Beethoven," he said. — AFP

Fake bus stop calms Swedish dementia sufferers who want to go home

In a Swedish nursing home, residents wait for a bus that never comes. Staff have installed a fake bus stop in a hallway to ease the minds of anxious dementia patients eager to leave. A bench is pushed up against the wall under an authentic-looking bus stop sign for the municipal transport company, complete with a map of the town of Sodertälje. An imaginary bus schedule

"It is very common... that they have this worry and want to go home" at a certain stage of Alzheimer's and dementia, she told AFP. "Some have their bags packed" as they wait on the bench, she said. The bus stop was installed four years ago and has helped patients on numerous occasions. "I had a lady who lived here and she would come to me several times a day and ask for

Brings back memories

Fake bus stops were erected in parks outside some retirement homes in Germany in 2008 to give wandering patients a place where they would instinctively go to sit. At the Swedish nursing home 35 kilometers (22 miles) southwest of Stockholm, where 17 people currently live, the measure is part of the patients' treatment. "It has brought some change here, it's like therapy," said Louise Bass, a nurse who has worked at the home for 13 years. The bench is most sought-after at the end of the day, when the patients are more likely to feel restless. "Everybody has taken a bus. They recognize the sign, so sometimes they think the bus is coming," Bass said. "We sit here and chat (and) they forget that they wanted to go out. It helps a lot."

The bus stop "brings back memories", added Rebecka Gabriellsson, manager of several of the town's nursing homes. "They can talk about where they worked, where they have travelled. It is a tool that helps them with their symptoms." But is it morally acceptable to lie to vulnerable patients?

An article published by the Journal of Health Policy Research in 2019 examined the question of fake bus stops. It showed that while the goal was to reduce the number of dementia patients trying to escape from nursing homes, the bus stops could also increase their sense of frustration and the feeling of being deceived. — AFP



Aerial picture shows the Tallhøiden nursing home in Sodertälje, southwest of Stockholm.

is even posted on the opposite wall. Caroline Wahlberg, who runs the Tallhøiden nursing home, sat down with Edward, a resident in his 80s whose piercing blue eyes looked vaguely off into the distance.

her parents to come and pick her up," Wahlberg said. "We used to sit on the bench with her and just wait. And then we started to talk... and then she was calmer (and) happier. And we could then go eat or watch TV," she said.



Caroline Wahlberg (left), manager of the Tallhøiden nursing home in Sodertälje, southwest of Stockholm, sits with an elder man on the bench of a fake bus stop installed in a corridor of the facility dedicated to patients with dementia. — AFP photos



The sign for a fake bus stop installed in a corridor of the Tallhøiden nursing home in Sodertälje, southwest of Stockholm, a facility dedicated to patients with dementia.



A bowl of Chinese fishballs are served with a plastic spoon at a takeaway counter in Hong Kong. — AFP

Hong Kong sticks a fork in disposable plastic products

Need a plastic fork at a Hong Kong restaurant? Come April 22, Earth Day, customers will have to start reaching for more eco-friendly cutlery, according to a bill passed Wednesday by the city's legislature. Plastic waste is the finance hub's second-largest source of municipal solid waste, with the average amount disposed a day totaling 2,331 tons in 2021 — a weight equivalent to nearly 70 adult humpback whales.

The city on Wednesday passed amendments to a "Product Eco-Responsibility Bill", implementing a blanket ban on the sale and provision of various plastic products — with the first phase taking effect on Earth Day, April 22, 2024. That means in 28,000 eateries across the city, "expanded polystyrene (EPS) tableware and other disposable plastic tableware that are small in size and difficult to recycle" will be prohibited for dine-in and takeaway services, said a government announcement.

Serving up soup in a plastic container is also a no-no, though using it for take-out is still allowed — until phase two kicks in. The government said phase two's start would "depend on the availability and affordability of the relevant non-plastic or reusable alternatives".

Freebies in Hong Kong's hotels and airlines will also look very different — plastic bottles of water or toiletries like plastic-handled toothbrushes, as well

as disposable ear plugs, will also be banned. Shops selling glow sticks, party hats, cake toppers and cotton buds will also be taking a hit. Any violations could result in a fine of between HK\$2,000 to HK\$100,000 (\$250 to \$12,800).

During the session, legislator Peter Koon fretted over the inconvenience eliminating these plastic items would cause as well as the extra costs for local residents and tourists. "I had the experience of buying takeaway hot soup from a shop that had adopted paper containers, but when I got home, the container had broken and the soup had run out," Koon said.

"In a society where Chinese cuisine is predominant, I urge authorities to be more careful or it may result in the opposite of what we wish." The real work of the bill will begin post-passage, said legislator Michael Tien. "How to introduce the alternative choices to the public, how to support the industries — this will be a very heavy and important responsibility for the (Environment and Ecology) Bureau." Welcoming the news, Greenpeace campaigner Leanne Tam said Hong Kong has been discussing this issue for "about a decade". "Hong Kong is now catching up with other cities in the region in terms of reducing plastic waste." — AFP

Lifestyle



Actors Sylvester Stallone (left) and Burt Young attend the "Rocky" Broadway opening night at the Winter Garden Theatre on March 13, 2014 in New York City. — AFP photos



British actress Judi Dench (left) talks with US actor Burt Young during the opening of the 46th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic.



US actor Burt Young attends the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences' Official New York Oscar Night Party at The Carlyle.

'Rocky' sidekick actor Burt Young dies at 83

US actor Burt Young, a former boxer who earned an Oscar nomination for his breakout role as Sylvester Stallone's sidekick in the smash hit "Rocky" film series, has died at 83. Stallone, who starred as the boxer Rocky Balboa in the iconic Hollywood franchise, on Wednesday hailed his "dear friend" Young as an "incredible man" and artist. "I and the World will miss you very much... RIP," wrote the "Rocky" star on Instagram. Young's daughter, Anne Morea Steingieser, confirmed his death to The New York

Times, which reported that he passed away on October 8 in Los Angeles.

Born in Queens, New York, Young spent a short time as a professional boxer before launching into acting, where he spun his grizzled, bulldog persona into a prolific career spanning over half a century. After several small roles in television and film, including Roman Polanski's "Chinatown," Young was cast as the stout sidekick Paulie in the 1976 drama "Rocky" written by Stallone and directed by John G. Avildsen.

In addition to the film's successful box office run, Young received an Academy Award nomination in 1977 in the Best Supporting Actor category. Carl Weathers, who played Apollo Creed, Rocky Balboa's opponent-turned-trainer in the series, said that Young was "a beautiful and talented soul." He was such an integral part of the Rocky family... Paulie will be with us forever," wrote the actor on X, formerly Twitter. — AFP

WHO says AI can transform healthcare if understood properly

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to transform health treatment but rapid roll-out without fully understanding how AI performs could end up harming patients, the World Health Organization said on Thursday. The WHO said AI held great promise for healthcare but also came with challenges, notably around privacy and the potential to entrench existing problems.



The United Nations' health agency issued a new publication detailing some of the main regulatory considerations on AI for health, so that authorities can build or adapt their guidance on using it. "With the increasing availability of health care data and the rapid progress in analytic techniques — whether machine learning, logic-based or statistical — AI tools could transform the health sector," the organization said.

The WHO said AI could strengthen clinical trials, improve medical diagnosis and treatment and supplement medical knowledge and skills. For example, AI

could help in places with a lack of specialist, by interpreting radiology images and retinal scans, it said.

However, the WHO added that AI is being rapidly deployed, sometimes without a proper understanding of how such technologies perform, "which could either benefit or harm end-users", both patients and professionals alike. When using health data, AI systems could be accessing sensitive personal information, so robust legal frameworks are needed to safeguard privacy and integrity, the WHO said.

Pros and cons

"Artificial intelligence holds great promise for health, but also comes with serious challenges, including unethical data collection, cyber-security threats and amplifying biases or misinformation," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "This new guidance will support countries to regulate AI effectively, to harness its potential, whether in treating cancer or detecting tuberculosis, while minimizing the risks," he added.

The WHO said AI systems depend on the code they are built with and the data they are trained on, and better regulation could help manage the risks of AI amplifying biases present in training data. "For example, it can be difficult for AI models to accurately represent the diversity of populations, leading to biases, inaccuracies or even failure," the WHO said.

"To help mitigate these risks, regulations can be used to ensure that the attributes — such as gender, race and ethnicity — of the people featured in the training data are reported and datasets are intentionally made representative," the organization added. The WHO outlined six areas for regulating AI for health. They include externally validating data, evaluating systems before release so as not to amplify biases and errors, looking at consent requirements on data privacy, and fostering collaboration between regulators, patients, governments and healthcare professionals. — AFP



Iranian film director Dariush Mehrjui and his wife Vahida Mohammadifar attend a ceremony in Tehran — AFP

Iran police arrest 'main killer' of director Mehrjui

Iranian police arrested the "main killer" of director Dariush Mehrjui who was stabbed to death along his wife at the weekend, Tasnim news agency reported on Thursday. The 83-year-old, associated with the Iranian new wave of cinema, and his wife Vahideh Mohammadifar, a 54-year-old screenwriter, were killed Saturday at their home in Karaj, a city in Alborz province west of Tehran.

"The main killer who was among those arrested by the police was identified and confirmed" during preliminary investigations, Tasnim said, citing the police. "Interrogations are still ongoing to identify the accomplices and hidden angles of this murder." Alborz province chief justice Hossein Fazeli-Harikandi said investigations indicated "personal differences" were the motive for the murder, according to the judiciary's Mizan Online website.

Police have arrested 10 people over the killings, Mizan reported on Tuesday, without providing fur-

ther details. Prominent figures from Iran's film industry joined hundreds of mourners Wednesday for the funeral of Mehrjui and his wife, among them the directors Jafar Panahi and Masoud Kimiai. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has ruled out any "link between the murder of Mehrjui and the serial assassinations" of dissident intellectuals in November 1998 committed by the country's secret service.

The 1998 crimes were attributed by the government to "uncontrolled elements" from the intelligence ministry, who were sentenced to prison terms of up to life. Mehrjui was best known for his 1969 metaphorical drama "The Cow" as well as his 1990 dark comedy "Hamoun" showing 24 hours in the life of an intellectual tormented by divorce and psychological anxieties. The couple were laid to rest on Thursday in the artists' section of the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in southern Tehran, according to state news agency IRNA. — AFP

Netflix gains subscribers with ads and password crackdown

Netflix on Wednesday said subscriber numbers grew nearly 11 percent to 247 million in the recently ended third quarter as it cracked down on password sharing and refined an ad-supported tier. The leading streaming service said it is increasing the price of its basic plan in the United States to \$11.99 monthly and its premium plan to \$22.99, with similar price "adjustments" set for Britain and France. "While we mostly paused price increases as we rolled out paid sharing... as we deliver more value to our members, we occasionally ask them to pay a bit more," Netflix said in the letter to shareholders.

Netflix shares leapt more than 12 percent to \$43.31 in after-market trades on the Nasdaq exchange. The streaming service said in an earnings report that its nascent ad-supported offering was gaining traction, with the number of users increasing nearly 70 percent over the quarter. Netflix reported a profit of \$1.68 billion on revenue of \$8.5 billion in the quarter, beating market expectations with its earnings figures.

"All-in-all, management's working hard to squeeze every last drop of cash possible from the available subscriber base, but as that cup begins to run dry, it will be a lot more important to understand exactly how successful the next phase of growth can be," said Sophie Lund-Yates, lead equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. In May the Silicon Valley giant expanded its crackdown on users sharing passwords with people beyond their immediate family, as it seeks to shore up revenue.

To convert non-paying users, Netflix has introduced "borrower" or "shared" accounts, in which subscribers can add extra viewers for a higher price, or transfer viewing profiles to new accounts. In a separate bid for revenue, Netflix launched an ad-subsidized offering around the same time as the crackdown and later eliminated its lowest priced ad-free plan. The ad-supported tier, launched late last year, costs \$7.



The Netflix logo is displayed at the entrance to Netflix Albuquerque Studios film and television production studio lot in Albuquerque, New Mexico. — AFP

Actors strike

The earnings report came as Netflix and other film and television makers see productions halted by an actors strike in the United States. "We are incredibly and totally committed to ending this strike," Netflix co-chief executive Ted Serandos said during an earnings presentation. "The industry, our communities and the economy are all hurting so we need to get a deal done that respects all sides as soon as we possibly can."

Hollywood writers had also been on strike, but came to a tentative agreement with studios just weeks ago. During the strike, Netflix said it was relying on productions ready for release and a large base of upcoming films and shows from around the world. A Netflix adaptation of Japanese manga comic "One Piece" was watched more than 18 million times in its first four days, putting it at the top of the charts.

The story of Monkey D Luffy, a boy with a straw hat and stretchy superpowers determined to become king of all pirates by finding a treasure known as the "One Piece" has captivated manga fans since its first editions in 1997. "We continue to focus on improving our slate, with best-in-class originals and licensed titles from around the world," Netflix told shareholders in the letter. Netflix cited popular shows including "One Piece," "Class Act" out of France, and "Guns & Gulaabs" from India. — AFP

Long-banned Alsatian finally allowed in French schools

In a school in eastern France, teacher Sandra Cronimus greets her pupils every morning with a lusty "Guede morje!" She is speaking Alsatian, the German dialect spoken widely in Alsace, a wealthy border region that France and Germany have fought over three times since 1870. Long forbidden, the language that legendary Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger grew up speaking, is now being taught for the first time in French state schools.

"Clap your hands if you like going to school," Cronimus urged her class of three and four year olds, who responded to the roll with "Ich bin do" - "I'm here" in Alsatian. The 15 children at the Rainbow nursery school in Brumath, north of Strasbourg, are taught three-quarters of the time in either Alsatian or German, with the rest in French. Three other schools near the city on the Rhine have also started teaching in Alsatian, a rarity in a country where regional languages have been pushed to the verge of extinction by a centralizing state, ever-vigilant of threats to French national identity.

'They forbade us from speaking' Brumath's mayor Etienne Wolf is de-

lighted by the change. "When I was a child they forbade us from speaking Alsatian," said the 68-year-old. "I want to defend Alsatian, which is falling away" particularly among young people, he added. "Often people understand it but don't speak it anymore." Classroom assistant Corinne Husser is equally over-

joyed to be able to speak her first language with the children. "It's great, it's the first time I have been able to work in Alsatian," she said.

While Alsatian is spoken by around half a million people, the dialect in Brumath is not exactly the same as the one spoken by Cronimus, who comes

from a village in the northern Vosges. And it is different again to what is spoken 150 kilometers (93 miles) to the south at the other end of the region. "In Altkirch it's completely different," said the teacher, who switches easily between German, Alsatian and French with the children. Cronimus got extra training from language experts to take on "this new challenge". Alsatian is already taught with German in a dozen community schools across Alsace run by the private ABCM network. Several take an immersive approach, with no French at all spoken in class.

Pierre Klein, the president of the Alsace Bilingual Federation, said it was a pity that the state schools did not follow their lead as "they could have fully benefited from the advantages of immersion". Even so he welcomed the belated official "recognition of the value of being bilingual given the rapid decline in the use of the dialect... particularly among the under 50s." However, Wolf said that the big problem with the completely immersive approach "is finding the people capable of teaching it". — AFP



Pupils take part in a nursery class immersed in Alsatian in Brumath, eastern France. — AFP

Sports

India overwhelm Bangladesh

Ton-up Kohli stars in cricket World Cup

PUNE: Virat Kohli's unbeaten century sealed India's fourth win from four World Cup matches as the hosts defeated Bangladesh by seven wickets in Pune on Thursday. Star batsman Kohli reached his century and ended the match in style with a six against spinner Nasum Ahmed when he needed three runs to complete his century and India required two more runs to reach a target of 257. They got there with more than eight overs to spare, finishing on 261-3.

Kohli faced 97 balls, including six fours and four sixes, with this century his third score in excess of fifty in four innings following contributions of 85 and 55 not out in recent pool wins over Australia and Afghanistan. But for Bangladesh, a third defeat in four matches left them with an uphill struggle to qualify for the semi-finals. The stage was set for Kohli by an opening partnership of 88 between India skipper Rohit Sharma (48) and Shubman Gill (53).

Rohit signalled India's intentions with a second-ball cover-driven four off Shoriful Islam as Bangladesh bowling coach Allan Donald, the former South Africa spearhead, looking on from the boundary edge. Rohit, fresh from scores of 131 and 86 against Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively, hooked Hasan Mahmud for a huge six only to hole out when trying to repeat the shot next ball. Kohli, however, was soon into his stride with a four - off a free hit - and a sublime straight six from successive Mahmud deliveries.

Gill's exit, as he just failed to clear the rope

for a third time, made little difference to the run-spree. Earlier, spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja sparked a top-order collapse against a Bangladesh side who had won three of their four previous ODIs against India. The Tigers were held to 256-8, having been well-placed at 93 without loss, after stand-in Tigers skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto won the toss on a good batting pitch. Jadeja took a miserly 2-38 from his 10 overs and Yadav 1-47.

Tanzid Hasan, whose 51 was the left-hander's maiden ODI fifty, and Liton Das (66) shared a fine opening stand while facing Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj only for Bangladesh to slump to 137-4. The 22-year-old Tanzid, whose highest score in eight previous ODIs was 16, completed a 41-ball fifty before he was lbw to left-arm wrist-spinner Yadav. Liton was still there but he carelessly lofted Jadeja to long-off. India were a bowler down after Hardik Pandya managed just three balls in the ninth over before limping off with ankle damage.

Kohli, bowling in an ODI for the first time in six years, completed Pandya's over. Mushfiqur Rahim's 38 and fellow veteran Mahmudullah's 46 bolstered Bangladesh's total. But with left-arm spinner and regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan sidelined following the thigh injury suffered during Friday's eight-wicket loss to New Zealand in Chennai, it never looked enough. India's quest for a third World Cup title continues against New Zealand in Dharamsala on Sunday, with Bangladesh facing South Africa in Mumbai on Tuesday. — AFP



PUNE: An Indian fan cheers during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between India and Bangladesh at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on October 19, 2023. — AFP

Cheika - behind quips, a shrewd rugby brain

PARIS: Were the Rugby World Cup to be decided on the personality of the coach, then Argentina's Michael Cheika and his larger than life persona would probably win. The charismatic 56-year-old is a master of off-the-cuff remarks, something lacking in the head coaches of the other semi-finalists, the studious Jacques Nienaber, dry Ian Foster and sometimes dour Steve Borthwick. However, behind the devil-may-care attitude is a top-class coach, who, as he did with Australia in 2015, has put together a side that has surprised many.

Whether like the Wallabies in 2015 he takes the Pumas to the final is dependent on them beating New Zealand, the team that denied his side the Webb Ellis trophy. That latter feat earned him the World Coach of the Year award. Cheika had already proven himself in winning both the northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere continental club trophies - the European Cup with Leinster in 2009 and the Super Rugby trophy with the Waratahs in 2014. He is the only coach to achieve that feat.

Cheika's spell with Australia ended after England whipped them in the 2019 quarter-finals but he has rediscovered his vim with Argentina since becoming assistant in 2020 and then head coach in 2022. This multi-faceted aspect of his character has been nurtured by having other jobs, including a successful fashion business. The latter might not seem a natural fit with Cheika, whose tie is usually loose at the throat and askew.

Fashion and rugby might be at opposite ends of the spectrum, but he says he learnt things from the former which are integral to his coaching philosophy. "It was a total paradox to what I was doing at the weekends," he told AFP with a grin in 2016. "No, I don't think I'd fit into a pair of Victoria Beckham's



MARSEILLE: Argentina's Australian head coach Michael Cheika (left) watches his players as they warm up ahead of the France 2023 Rugby World Cup quarter-final match between Wales and Argentina at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille. — AFP

jeans, not quite my size! "But it was also about managing people and people who aren't normally in your domain and learning how to get the best out of them. "It was about building relationships."

'That takes courage'

Cheika is heavily influenced by his late father, Joseph. Joseph left Lebanon for Australia in 1950 and Cheika's mother Therese followed 10 years later, carrying a letter from his family recommending he marry her. "There you have someone who left his country with nothing," Cheika told AFP. "Then he rocked up in another country - and it was seven days on an aeroplane back then - and said 'right, OK, I've got to start from nothing,' after being dropped off in Redfern Park (in Sydney). "Well that sort of no fear factor is something I have really taken from my Dad." Cheika senior arrived in Australia virtually penniless and friendless and went from working for a sewing machine company to running his own business and receiving an award from the late Queen Elizabeth II.

"I don't think it's so much about what he achieved,

I think it is more about the fearless approach to you leaving your family at 20," said Cheika. "To go to a place which you don't know and may never see your family again, which he didn't - his parents died - that takes courage." This fearlessness came to the fore early on when Cheika was playing for renowned Sydney club Randwick. The 20-year-old No 8 got bowled over by legendary All Black Wayne Shelford, but sprang back to his feet and snarled: "Is that all you've got, mate?"

Cheika is fiercely proud of his heritage - "I class myself as Australian-Lebanese" he said when he coached Lebanon at the Rugby League World Cup last year - but if there is one thing he regrets it is having left to play abroad rather than fight for a Test place. On the flip side he had taken a lot from his bohemian wanderings. "It has been a big part of my life, no doubt about it," said Cheika. "Learning about different people, different experiences, different cultures and how to fit in and get the best out of people and out of myself in that environment. "I would never change that part of my life." — AFP

New Zealand reset after Ireland high to tackle Argentina

PARIS: New Zealand have reset from their thrilling win over Ireland to prepare for Friday's World Cup semi-final against Argentina with the pain of losing four years ago at the same stage "a big driver". "That feeling helped us reset after what was an emotional game against Ireland and everything on the line last week," said All Blacks scrum-half Aaron Smith. "That's been the big lesson for us, taking the positives, acknowledging the step we took. "And how much that cost on the body, physically and emotionally, and rebuilding and finding the edge for what is another huge game for us and an opportunity for us to push forward in this comp which is our ultimate dream."

New Zealand edged Ireland, the then-world number one team, 28-24 in a pulsating quarter-final last weekend, while Argentina beat Wales 29-17. "That was the most proud All Blacks performance I've been part of," said Smith, a member of the New Zealand team that lost to England in the 2019 semi-finals. "The build-up, the emotion, the game, the spectacle itself. It felt like that game went on for two days, that second half felt like forever. But it was so much fun and intensity and two teams just not giving up."

Smith added: "We are lucky enough to have another opportunity this weekend and we want to be better than we were last week." Argentina went down 27-10 to 14-man England in their opening pool match, but have steadily improved as the tournament has advanced. But their Australian coach Michael Cheika, who led the Wallabies to the World Cup final in 2015, was in no doubt about what lay ahead at the Stade de France.

"New Zealand have been playing for many years, they are the number one team in world rugby. We know the challenge they represent," he said. "We know the challenges are getting harder and harder. The history is not in our favor but it is up to us to change that. We have a chance to on Friday and we will be ready. When we arrive on the field we will do what we do best. "In a World Cup semi-final they are

PSG see off Man Utd to qualify for Women's Champions League

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain scuppered Manchester United's dreams of qualifying for a first Women's Champions League with a 3-1 win at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday. The hosts started brightly, following a 1-1 first-leg draw in the final qualifying round tie, when Tabitha Chawinga saw her effort cleared off the line by Maya Le Tissier in the 10th minute. The breakthrough did not take long to come for the French league runners-up when Lieke Martens bent a shot beyond Mary Earps in the United goal to give PSG a one-goal lead.

The score remained the same until half-time with both sides looking their most dangerous on the counter. Shortly after the break, Lisa Naalsund got the Reds back on terms through a 47th-minute strike. Parity was short-lived, however, as Martens struck again one minute later to restore the Paris side's lead.

Man United immediately set about finding a second equalizer and only fine saves from PSG goalkeeper Katarzyna Kiedrzynek kept the home side's lead intact. French international Sandy Baltimore sealed the match for PSG in the 57th minute when she chipped the ball over Earps for a 3-1 lead on the night. The visitors thought they had one back when Leah Galton headed in a cross, but the referee adjudged her to have fouled the PSG goal.

"I hope that this victory will serve to bring the group closer together, we were missing a bit of soul at times. This should give us momentum," said PSG head coach Jocelyn Precheur. Earlier in the evening, Paris FC pulled off a spectacular upset by beating two-time European champions Wolfsburg 2-0 for a 5-3 aggregate success. Goals in either half from Julie Dufour and Louise Fleury, in the 90th minute, sent the French club into their first Champions League group stage. Both teams missed penalties on an eventful night in Germany as last year's finalists Wolfsburg crashed out before the competition proper. — AFP

dangerous everywhere. The contest in the lineup and the scrums, that is where the greatest challenges will lie. We have been training as best we can, we will be ready. We will see what happens."

Little-changed teams

Cheika made just the one change to the starting XV from the one that surprised Wales in the quarters. The 56-year-old selected Gonzalo Bertranou at scrum-half at the expense of Tomas Cubelli, who drops out of the 23 altogether. It was a similar story for New Zealand coach Ian Foster, who made two changes and one positional switch to his team, including recalling winger Mark Tele'a.

In-form Tele'a was dropped for the Ireland quarter after breaking team protocol, but makes his return at the expense of Leicester Fainga'anuku, who drops out of the match-day 23 in what Foster called



GROISSY-SUR-SEINE: New Zealand's inside centre Jordie Barrett (left) and New Zealand's scrum-half Aaron Smith (center) attend a training session at the Omnisport Croissy Stadium, in Croissy-sur-Seine, western Paris, as part of the France 2023 Rugby World Cup. — AFP

a "tough selection". "He's been our form winger. We have got a faith in him and think he is in good place to play this game." Foster said of Tele'a. History is indeed on New Zealand's side, the All Blacks having won 33 of 36 encounters between the two sides, Los Pumas claiming two victories, with one match drawn. The All Blacks' last loss to the South Americans, 25-18, came last year in Christchurch, having first tasted defeat in the 2020 Tri-Nations in Sydney. — AFP

'Weird' journey takes Chessum from second tier to World Cup semi

PARIS: When England impressively beat the then two-time holders New Zealand in the 2019 Rugby World Cup semi-finals, lock forward Ollie Chessum was a teenager watching the game on television. Chessum, who turned 23 in September, had been cut loose by the academy at Leicester Tigers. That meant that after finishing school, he joined second-tier club Nottingham with thoughts of ever pulling on an England jersey a distant dream.

A return to Leicester on a senior deal in 2020, however, altered his path and a Test debut followed in 2022 as a replacement in a 33-0 Six Nations win over Italy in Rome. On Saturday, he is set to start the World Cup semi-final against South Africa as England eye revenge for defeat in the decider four years ago. "I took a bit of a weird journey than most people, going through academies and stuff and I am proud of that," Chessum said this week.

"Nottingham were the last people there to approach me and say 'We want to give you a shot'. "They were incredible with me. I have to give them massive credit for me being here. "If someone told me back in 2019 I would be at the World Cup I would have laughed in their face." After his Test bow, Chessum had to wait just five months for his first international start, the series-clinching win over Australia in July 2022. He has become a mainstay under Steve Borthwick, Chessum's former coach at Leicester, after the ex-England captain took over from the sacked Eddie Jones in December.

Despite reaching the last four, England, winners in 2003, have failed to convince many people of their title credentials, underlined by a first loss to Fiji before the tournament. They beat Argentina, Japan, Chile and Samoa clinically during the group stage before gaining revenge over Pacific Islanders Fiji in last weekend's quarter-final. "In the warm-up games at the start, we were in a strange place," Chessum said. "But we are starting to figure ourselves out and find our identity. "We are growing as a team and I think that is a scary thing for any



England's lock Ollie Chessum

team. "We are not the complete article yet and we are winning games."

'Back in the mix'

Ginger-haired Chessum has become first-choice under Borthwick and has built a consistent second-row partnership with Maro Itoje. "It's really growing now," Chessum said. "It's going to take time for relationships like that to grow and to mould but I really feel like it's in a good place now." During his time at Leicester, Chessum, whose brother Lewis plays for the club and England's under-20s, has come across quite a few of his opponents this weekend. He plays alongside Springboks forward Marco van Staden, No. 8 Jasper Wiese and fly-half Handre Pollard at Welford Road. Pollard, who helped the Boks to the 2019 final win over England, was a late addition to their squad having recovered from a calf injury.

"I'm good friends with Handre back at Leicester and you don't want to see your mates missing out on opportunities you think they're deserving of," Chessum said. "You want to be playing against the biggest names, in the biggest competitions, on the biggest stages. "It's great to see him back in the mix." On Saturday at the Stade de France, one of Chessum's tasks will be keeping an eye out on South Africa lock Eben Etzebeth, who was at his imposing best as they edged hosts France in last weekend's last-eight tie. Last Sunday, Etzebeth, 31, became the joint-third most capped Springbok on 117 appearances alongside Tendai Mtavara, and behind Bryan Habana and Victor Matfield. — AFP

Sports

Clinical New Zealand rout Afghanistan at World Cup

Giant-killing Afghanistan handed a brutal reality check



CHENNAI: Afghanistan's Ikram Alikhil leaves the bouncer during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between New Zealand and Afghanistan at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — AFP

CHENNAI: New Zealand handed giant-killing Afghanistan a brutal reality check on Wednesday when they exploited a disastrous fielding performance to romp to a 149-run victory at the Cricket World Cup. Glenn Phillips, Tom Latham and Will Young all scored half centuries and benefitted from dropped catches to score a fighting 288-6. The Black Caps then ran through Afghanistan, who had shocked defending champions England last time out, for just 139 in 34.4 overs. "I thought 250 was par. We are in an environment where we keep working for each other and play as a team," said man of the match Phillips who made 71.

The victory gives New Zealand, runners-up at the last two World Cups, a fourth victory in as many games and comfortably on course for the semi-finals. Fast bowler Lockie Ferguson took 3-19, spinner Mitchell Santner claimed 3-39 while veteran seamer Trent Boult chipped in with 2-18 as New Zealand turned the screw. Afghanistan have one win and three defeats from their four games.

"We are very disappointed because at this level you have to take those kind of catches. End of the day those catches hurt us," admitted captain Hashmatullah Shahidi, one of the worst culprits. They had hoped Rahmanullah Gurbaz could repeat his fireworks against England when he made 80. However, on Wednesday, the opener was cleaned up by Matt Henry in the sixth over for just 11. Boult dismissed Ibrahim Zadran (14) and Azmatullah Omarzai (27) while Rachin Ravindra dismissed Rahmat Shah who was the top-scorer for Afghanistan with 36.

Santner completed 100 wickets in his 98th ODI when he dismissed Mohammad Nabi for seven before wrecking the rest of the batting in the company of Ferguson. Earlier, Phillips hit 71 off 80 balls, Latham made 68 off 74 and opener Young 54 off 64 balls to lift New Zealand from a precarious 110-4 after they were sent in to bat on a slow pitch. Mark Chapman fired a rapid 25 off 12 balls with two fours and a six as New Zealand scored 62 runs in the last five overs. Afghanistan dropped as many as five catches.

These included Young being dropped by Rahmat

Shah off Fazalhaq Farooqi before he had scored in the first over while skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi let off Ravindra on nought and Latham on 38. New Zealand were off to a slow start of 30 in the seventh over when Mujeeb Ur Rahman removed Devon Conway for 20. Young, replacing skipper Kane Williamson who fractured his thumb in the last game, added 79 for the second wicket with Ravindra who scored a 41-ball 32. But Afghanistan hit back with three wickets off just nine balls for one run as pacer Omarzai dismissed Ravindra and Young in the same over.

Young had three sixes and four boundaries in his knock. In the next over spinner Rashid Khan had Daryl Mitchell for one as New Zealand lost their way. It was left to Phillips, who cracked four sixes and as many boundaries, to join stand-in skipper Latham in a solid fifth wicket stand of 144 to revive the innings. Latham hit three boundaries and two sixes but he and Phillips fell for the addition of just one run, leaving Chapman to provide late impetus. Fast bowlers Naveen-ul-Haq and Omarzai took two wickets apiece. — AFP

Indonesia endorses Saudi Arabia's 2034 World Cup bid

JAKARTA: Indonesia's football federation has said it supports Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2034 World Cup, ending the possibility of its own proposal to co-host the event with Australia. Last week, Indonesian FA president Erick Thohir had said the country was in talks with Australia for a possible joint 2034 World Cup bid, despite the Asian confederation having de-

clared its support for Saudi Arabia's candidacy. But Thohir - who also serves as a government minister and was formerly the owner of Serie A club Inter Milan - said the country would now look to host the event after 2034. "Indonesia supports Saudi Arabia's bid to host the FIFA World Cup in 2034," Thohir said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Indonesia continues to prepare for its bid to host the FIFA World Cup after 2034, as well as other FIFA competitions," he added. Indonesia's scrapped joint bid proposal with Australia could also have involved games in New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Thohir said last week. Football Australia reiterated earlier this month that it was considering a bid for football's 2034 showpiece event but did not mention

a co-host arrangement with Indonesia. But Australian officials had mentioned the possibility of a joint bid with Jakarta in June.

Global football body FIFA has invited bids from the Asia and Oceania regions for the rotating World Cup hosting rights with a deadline of October 31 after naming Morocco, Spain and Portugal as joint hosts for 2030. Riyadh's bid is the latest step in a campaign to turn the kingdom into a global sports powerhouse. Indonesian football has been mired in controversy over the past year. A stadium stampede in Java a year ago killed 135 people and Indonesia lost the hosting rights to the U-20 World Cup after protests in the Muslim-majority nation over the Zionist entity's participation. — AFP

More PGA players will jump to LIV Golf

MIAMI: Six-time major winner Phil Mickelson said Wednesday that more PGA Tour players will jump to Saudi-backed LIV Golf despite a framework agreement for a merger by the end of 2023. The 53-year-old US left-hander, among the first to leap from the PGA to the upstart circuit last year, spoke Wednesday ahead of Friday's start of the season-ending LIV Golf Team Championship at Doral. "I've been fielding calls, as we all have, from players that are free agents to PGA Tour players to DP World Tour players that want to come over," Mickelson said.

Asked if he expected an "exodus" of talent from the PGA and DP World tours, Mickelson was confident of more movement. "Do I think that? No. I know that's going to happen," Mickelson said. "When players look at LIV, they're wanting to be a part of it. Everybody here is happy and enjoying what we're doing, enjoying the team aspect of it and enjoying each other and the camaraderie and enjoying playing golf globally and all the benefits that come with playing this tour.

"So there are a lot of players that see that and want to be a part of it. The question is how many spots are available. There's a lot more players that want to come than there are spots." Merger talks have continued between the three tours since a June announcement of a framework agreement, but there is a December 31 deadline for any deal to be completed. A PGA Tour Policy Board with a majority of players including Tiger Woods must approve any merger deal.

"I think the merger talks allow for it," Mickelson said of players jumping to LIV. "I think it allows and kind of opens the door for that." One door slammed shut on LIV Golf last week was by the Official World Golf Ranking (OWGR) board, which rejected LIV Golf's appeal to have rankings points awarded for its events, citing issues with LIV's limited player turnover rate and team format issues impacting individual play. LIV players have been banned from PGA Tour events, limiting their ability to earn ranking points.

Mickelson, however, says there's more than meets the eye to the rejection. "I do want to bring to light as to why exactly they are doing what they are doing. It's not what they are putting out there," Mickelson said. "There's a lot more going on behind the scenes as to the importance of us to the getting points to (equal) the PGA Tour." American Brooks Koepka, this year's PGA Championship winner, and Australian Cameron Smith, last year's British Open champion, are the only LIV players still among the world rankings top 50, a key cutoff point for entry into major tournaments. — AFP



ARLINGTON: Josh Jung #6 of the Texas Rangers hits a two run home run against Hector Neris #50 of the Houston Astros during the seventh inning in Game Three of the American League Championship Series at Globe Life Field on October 18, 2023. — AFP

Astros stun Rangers 8-5 to tighten MLB playoff series

WASHINGTON: Jose Altuve smashed a homer and Jordan Alvarez drove in two runs to lead the defending champion Houston Astros over the Texas Rangers 8-5 on Wednesday in the Major League Baseball playoffs. Mauricio Dubon had three hits and Martin Maldonado drove in two runs for triumphant Houston, but the Rangers still lead the best-of-seven American League Championship Series 2-1 and will host game four on Thursday and game five on Friday. "It was a must win for us," Altuve said. "We had no choice. We had to win this one." "Tomorrow, same mentality. One game at a time. One batter at a time - and I think we can make it happen."

Meanwhile, Philadelphia leads Arizona 2-0 in the National League Championship Series, which continues on Thursday in Phoenix after a travel day. The Astros, in the ALCS for a seventh consecutive season, captured their 17th victory in their past 20 road games, including sweeping a regular-season series last month against the Rangers. "I don't really have an answer for that," Altuve said of Houston's success at Texas. "But I can tell you it's a big win for us."

Rangers starting pitcher Max Scherzer, obtained

from the New York Mets at the MLB trade deadline, had been out since September 13 with a strained right shoulder muscle. The 39-year-old US right-hander, a three-time Cy Young Award winner for best pitcher, won a World Series title with Washington in 2019 by beating the Astros, but he struggled from the start in game three. Houston struck first in the second inning when Alvarez was hit by a Scherzer pitch, took second on a Kyle Tucker walk, reached third on Dubon's single and scored on a two-out wild pitch by Scherzer.

Maldonado followed with a two-run single to left field and the Astros grabbed a 3-0 lead. Altuve blasted his 25th career playoff homer over the left-field wall in the third inning to boost it to 4-0. The margin grew to 5-0 in the fourth when Jose Abreu doubled, took third base on a Tucker ground out and scored on a Dubon single. Astros starter Cristian Javier pitched 4 2/3 no-hit innings but the 26-year-old Dominican right-hander was tagged for a single by Nathaniel Lowe followed by a two-run homer by Josh Jung to lift Texas to 5-2.

"His concentration and focus, his execution on every pitch, he showed up tonight," Altuve said of Javier. "He gave us a big opportunity to win." Texas outfielder Leody Taveras stole a homer from Alvarez with a leaping catch over the centerfield wall in the sixth inning. But Houston's Michael Brantley made a lunging grab for a fly out to rob the Rangers' Adolis Garcia of a run-scoring hit in the sixth as well. Alvarez smacked a bases-loaded single off Texas reliever Will Smith to drive in two runs for Houston in the seventh for a 7-2 advantage. — AFP

News in Brief

Moscow accuses IOC of 'ethnic discrimination'

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the International Olympic Committee of "ethnic discrimination" ahead of the 2024 Paris Games, from which Russian and Belarusian athletes are banned from competing under their national flags. The IOC still has to make a final ruling on whether athletes from Russia and Belarus, a key ally for Moscow in its war with Ukraine, will be permitted to compete next summer. "Thanks to some heads of the modern International Olympic Committee we found out that an invitation to the Games is not an unconditional right for the best athletes, but some kind of privilege and you can get it not on sports results but by some political gestures," Putin said at a sports forum in the Urals city of Perm. "The Games themselves could be used as an instrument of political pressure towards those people who have nothing to do with politics, and as a gross—in reality—racist, ethnic discrimination." — AFP

EPL targets biggest ever TV rights deal

LONDON: The Premier League is aiming to smash its own record domestic television rights deal after making 70 more matches available for broadcast from 2025. Currently, 200 matches per season are sold to broadcasters in the UK with the three-year deal that runs until the 2024/25 season worth a reported £4.8 billion (\$5.8 billion). A Saturday afternoon blackout, designed to protect attendances in the lower leagues, will remain. However, matches switched to Sundays due to the involvement of clubs in European fixtures will be broadcast live for the first time. The extra games will also come from every match of five midweek rounds per season and the final round of the season being shown live. Rather than the usual three-year cycle, the Premier League is inviting offers on a four-year deal lasting till the 2028/29 season. — AFP

Kenya says World Aquatics has lifted swimming ban

NAIROBI: Kenyan swimmers will be allowed to resume international competitions after the global swimming federation lifted a four-year ban, according to the country's Olympic committee. The East African nation was banned by World Aquatics in 2019 after the Kenya Swimming Federation (KSF) failed to meet election deadlines. KSF also faced allegations of discrimination while selecting swimmers for national, regional and continental competitions. Kenya's Olympic committee said the ban had been lifted "with immediate effect". "Kenyan swimmers can now fly our flag proudly," secretary general Francis Mutuku said on Tuesday. "While the ban has been lifted, the hard work starts to ensure compliance with all the requisite laws and regulation." Sports Minister Ababu Namwamba on Tuesday said lifting of the ban was a "great day for Kenyan swimming" and expressed optimism that the team will compete at next year's Paris Olympics. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, STEVEN JAORAWALA, holder of Indian Passport No. K3652734 having permanent address T-85 Choti Gol building Yusuf Azad Qawaal Marq (Belgrami road) opposite Bhabha hospital Kurla (West) Mumbai, pin 400070 Maharashtra India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MUSTAALI MUZAFFAR HUSAIN and (surname) JAORAWALA. Maharashtra Gazette No. U-93039. #4248 - 20-10-2023

Benzema and French minister clash over 'Muslim Brotherhood' claim

'The government and its friends have chosen to demonize you'

PARIS: The lawyer of Karim Benzema has hit back at France's interior minister after he accused the French football star who plays for Saudi team Al-Ittihad of links to the Muslim Brotherhood Islamist group. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin made the accusations after the reigning Ballon d'Or winner and former Real Madrid forward posted a message on social media about the conflict between Zionist entity and Palestinian militant group Hamas. "All our prayers are for the inhabitants of Gaza who are once again victims of these unjust bombings which spare no women or children," Benzema wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Hamas on October 7 launched shock raids into Zionist entity, killing 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and seizing about 200 hostages. Zionist entity has since then launched wave after wave of retaliatory air strikes, killing more than 3,000 Palestinians in Gaza. Darmanin, speaking on the CNews Channel, alleged that Benzema "has a notorious link with the Muslim Brotherhood", a Sunni Muslim Islamist group with its origins in Egypt that is now banned by Cairo.

"This is false! Karim Benzema has never had the slightest relationship with this organization," Benzema's lawyer Hugues Vigier said in a statement. He said that Benzema was expressing "natural compassion" with "what many today describe as war crimes being committed in Gaza, but which does not detract from the horror of the terrorist acts of October 7, something not open to discussion". The lawyer added that he was planning to file a complaint against Darmanin for his comments.

'Intolerable exploitation'

A source close to Darmanin doubled down on the minister's comments, criticizing Benzema over an alleged "drift" towards a tougher interpretation of Islam over the last years. But his lawyer Vigier said: "We are once again witnessing an intolerable exploitation of Karim Benzema and the 'symbolic figure' that we like to make him." Benzema, 35, who was born in France to parents of Algerian origin, has been one of the standout French stars of the last decade. He joined the Saudi club on a hugely lucrative three-year deal this year

after 14 seasons with Real Madrid where he lifted five Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey.

But after a stellar 2021-22 season when he led Real to Champions League glory and was rewarded with the Ballon d'Or for the world's best player, he was troubled by injuries that ruled him out of France's World Cup campaign in Qatar last year. Darmanin, 41, has carved out a reputation as a hard-liner in the mould of his political mentor ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy and makes no secret of his own presidential ambitions.

French hard-left figurehead and three-time presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon weighed in on the controversy to back Benzema while admitting: "I don't know you and I don't know anything about football." "The government and its friends have chosen to demonize you," he said, accusing the authorities of seeing Benzema as "French only on paper". Benzema is not the only Muslim football star to enter the debate, with Liverpool and Egypt player Mohamed Salah calling for humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza and an end to "massacres". — AFP



Al-Ittihad's French forward #09 Karim Benzema

Salah calls for end to Gaza 'massacre'

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool and Egypt football star Mohamed Salah called for humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza on Wednesday as he pleaded for an end to "massacres" in the conflict between Zionists and Palestinian militant group Hamas. Gazans have been facing dire shortages as the territory was effectively sealed off in the wake of the October 7 attacks by Hamas militants on Zionist communities and military posts that claimed 1,400 lives. On Tuesday, a deadly rocket strike hit a Gaza hospital that Hamas blamed on Zionists.

However, Zionists denied responsibility, claiming the strike was caused by an errant rocket fired by Palestinian militants. A Champions League and Premier



Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah

League winner with Liverpool, Egypt captain Salah, 31, is one of the most popular athletes in the Arab world. "It is not always easy to speak in a time like this. There has been too much violence and

too much heartbreak and brutality," Salah said in a video posted to his 62.7 million followers on Instagram. "The escalations in recent weeks is unbearable to witness. All lives are sacred and must be protected. The massacres need to stop, families are being torn apart."

After a visit by US President Joe Biden to Tel Aviv on Wednesday, Zionist entity said it had agreed to his request to allow aid into the besieged Gaza via Egypt due to mounting concern about dwindling supplies and warnings of a humanitarian catastrophe. "What is clear now is that humanitarian aid to Gaza must be allowed immediately. The people there are in terrible conditions," Salah added. "The scenes at the hospital last night were horrifying. The people of Gaza need food, water and medical supplies urgently. I am calling on world leaders to come together to prevent further slaughter of innocent souls - humanity must prevail." — AFP

Algeria suspends football in solidarity with Palestinians

ALGIERS: The Algerian Football Federation (FAF) announced on Wednesday it had suspended all matches "until further notice" in support of the Palestinians. "Expressing solidarity with the resilient, brotherly Palestinian people and out of respect for the memories of the venerable and glorious martyrs who fell victim to the savage Zionist aggressions in the Gaza Strip against the occupied Palestinian population, the FAF has decided to suspend all competitions and matches until further notice," the federation

said in a statement. The decision followed a rocket strike on a hospital courtyard in Gaza which the Islamist group Hamas says killed hundreds of people. Hamas has blamed Zionists for the strike, which the governments of multiple Arab and Muslim countries have accepted, but Zionists presented what it said was evidence that the explosion came from a malfunctioning Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket.

Traditionally a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause, Algeria announced on Sunday that it was willing to host "all the official and non-official matches of the Palestinian national football team as part of the preparations for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers and the 2027 Asian Cup and cover all the expenses related to these events". As a result, the World Cup qualifier between the Palestinian team and Australia on November 21 will take place on Algerian soil. — AFP

He and Red Bull know the chasing pack will be as keen to catch them as ever, particularly as the sport's prize money is only distributed to teams via their finishing positions in the constructors' championship and not via the drivers' title race. Mercedes, on 326 points, will seek to extend their 28-point advantage ahead of Ferrari with strong performances to secure second place, while McLaren attempt to close an 11-point gap on Aston Martin for fourth. The difference is worth tens of millions of dollars.

Piastri in form

McLaren's Australian rookie Oscar Piastri won the Qatar sprint and finished second in the main race. On his first appearance in Austin, he will seek to maintain his personal momentum while teammate Lando Norris will hope to mark his 100th start with success. Mercedes will be seeking to erase the disappointment of Qatar, where seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton collided with team-mate George Russell. Team boss Toto Wolff confirmed their cars will have an updated floor in Austin, hoping to regain enough race pace to match McLaren.

"It will be the last significant update we will introduce this year," said Wolff, hinting that like most teams Mercedes' attention will then switch to 2024. Wolff also seeks to paper over any perceived cracks appearing in the relationship between his drivers. The Texan weekend will also see Daniel Ricciardo return for Alpha Tauri after missing five races since breaking his hand at the Dutch Grand Prix while the American-owned Haas team will not only bring a major upgrade for their home event, but may maintain their opposition to fellow Americans Andretti's bid to join the grid. — AFP

Prescott, Aubrey lead Dallas to win over Chargers

LOS ANGELES: Dak Prescott rushed for one touchdown and threw another as the Dallas Cowboys bounced back from their thrashing against San Francisco to beat the Los Angeles Chargers 20-17 on Monday. Dallas quarterback Prescott was given a torrid time by the Chargers defense, sacked five times as Los Angeles chased only their third win of the season. But after a muffed punt allowed the Chargers to tie the game at 17-17 in the fourth quarter, Prescott kept his composure to lead Dallas on a 15-play, 54-yard drive to set up a winning field goal for Brandon Aubrey with just over two minutes remaining.

The drive included a crucial third and nine conversion by Prescott that kept the chains moving to leave Aubrey in field goal range. Aubrey, a 28-year-old rookie who gave up a promising soccer career to pursue a career in the NFL, stepped up to slot what turned out to be the winning points — his 16th successful field goal from 16 attempts this season. The Chargers had one last drive in an attempt to save the game, but with no timeouts remaining, quarterback Justin Herbert had little margin for error.

The Chargers drive fizzled however when Herbert was sacked on second down and then saw a long third down completion attempt picked off by Dallas defender Stephon Gilmore to effectively end the game. "We're just a resilient team," said Prescott, who finished with 272 passing yards. "Guys just played their asses off. Offense, defense, it's something we can build on." Dallas — billed as potential Super Bowl contenders at the start of the season — had been humbled 42-10 by San Francisco last week.

However the Cowboys will now return to Texas with a 4-2 record in the NFC East heading into a bye week. "We were physical, way more physical than we were last week — but hell, that's the past," Prescott said. "Right now we're moving forward and this was a great one for us to get going into the bye week." Earlier, the Chargers had taken the lead through Keenan Allen's close-range touchdown in the first quarter before Prescott got the Cowboys back on level terms with an 18-yard rush into the end zone.

Aubrey kicked a field goal to put Dallas 10-7 up at the break but Cameron Dicker slotted a 43-yard effort to level for the Chargers at 10-10 heading into



Dak Prescott #4 of the Dallas Cowboys

the fourth quarter. Brandin Cooks collected a two-yard pass from Prescott to put Dallas 17-10 ahead but then the Chargers were thrown a lifeline after a bungled punt set up a game-tying score for Gerald Everett. Hopes of a Chargers comeback were snuffed out though after Aubrey's second field goal put Dallas ahead before Herbert's late interception ended the game. — AFP

Verstappen chases records as F1 starts Americas stint

AUSTIN: Max Verstappen will be racing for pride, points and records this weekend at the United States Grand Prix as his rivals compete for positional prize money behind the newly-crowned champion. But in the first of four weekends' racing in the Americas before the season-closer in Abu Dhabi, much attention will be taken by politicking and preparations for 2024 with Ferrari and Mercedes striving to close the gap behind the dominant Red Bull team.

Verstappen, however, will be the man who takes the limelight at the Circuit of the Americas where he will seek to secure a hat-trick of successes and his 50th career victory, having secured his third consecutive drivers' title in Qatar. That win was his 14th in 17 races this year and might, for another driver in another age, have signaled a chance to relax, but not for the 26-year-old Dutchman who is focused on winning every contest.

"It could be quite hectic for us this weekend," he said, referring to another Grand Prix embracing a Saturday dedicated to a sprint race. "We will have only one session to try and find the optimum balance in the car and it looks as if we will have high temperatures again too." Verstappen could equal his 2022 record of 15 wins in a year and close the gap on four-time world champions Alain Prost (51 wins) and Sebastian Vettel (53) in the all-time list for most race victories.