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Kuwait slams Zionist war crimes

Qatar negotiating release of 10-15 hostages for Gaza humanitarian pause

NEW YORK: Kuwait reiterated Tuesday that the Zionist occupation is deliberately adopting a collective punishment approach and committing war crimes against humanity in Gaza Strip, which is in continuous and deliberate violation of the United Nations Charter, international law and international humanitarian law. The remarks were made in a speech delivered by Second Secretary Fahad Al-Ajmi of the Permanent Delegation of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations before the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly concerned with special political issues and decolonization.

"What we are witnessing today is genocide and the world stands as a spectator," Ajmi said, noting that this "coward entity does not differentiate between an infant, a child, a woman or an old man". Ajmi stated

that the language of numbers "cannot be obscured by the misleading and shameful media of the occupying entity. From the year 2015 until the year 2022, the General Assembly adopted 140 resolutions condemning the (Zionist) occupation; at the same time, there was not a single resolution condemning Palestine."

The diplomatic attache added: "We always hear the term peaceful coexistence, and that the two-state solution is the only path and solution, and the brothers in Palestine did not object to that." He stressed they "went beyond that and did their best to reach peace, but the stubbornness, arrogance and treachery of the other side prevented them from doing so".

Meanwhile, Qatar is mediating negotiations between the Zionist entity and Hamas for the potential release of 10-15 captives held in Gaza in exchange

for a humanitarian pause in fighting, a source briefed on the talks told AFP Wednesday. "Negotiations mediated by the Qataris in coordination with the US are ongoing to secure the release of 10-15 hostages in exchange for a one- to two-day ceasefire," the informed source said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the talks' sensitivity.

Fighting has raged in Gaza for over a month following the Palestinian group's shock Oct 7 attack that killed more than 1,400 people and took more than 240 captives. In Gaza, 10,569 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the Zionist entity's retaliatory military campaign.

Qatar has been engaged in intense diplomacy to secure the release of those held by Hamas, negotiating the handover of four hostages — two Zionists

and two Americans — in recent weeks. The wealthy Gulf state has been a fierce supporter of the Palestinian cause and has open channels of communication with Hamas, the Islamist rulers of Gaza.

Qatar, which hosts the largest US military base in the Middle East, also hosts the political office of Hamas and is the main residence of its self-exiled leader Ismail Haniya. Amid repeated calls for a ceasefire, Qatar has lamented the escalating violence visited on Gaza and its 2.3 million inhabitants saying the Zionist bombing undermines mediation efforts and de-escalation. The G7 grouping of economically advanced nations called on Wednesday for "humanitarian pauses and corridors" in the conflict but refrained from calling for a ceasefire during talks in Japan. — Agencies

US House censures Tlaib over comments on Zionist atrocities



Rashida Tlaib

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives voted on Tuesday to censure Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American in Congress, over her comments on the Zionist-Hamas war, US media reported. The Democrat was censured by Republicans and some members of her own party in a resolution that passed by 234 votes to 188. The resolution said Tlaib was "promoting false narratives regarding the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on (the Zionist entity) and for calling for the destruction of the state of (the Zionist entity)."

The censure identified a series of statements made by Tlaib, including a video posted on social media in which she accuses President Joe Biden of supporting what she described as the "genocide" of Palestinians and calling on him to back a ceasefire, according to the text of the motion. The video also shows a crowd chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which the motion said "is widely recognized as a genocidal call to violence to destroy (the Zionist entity)."

Tlaib had said on X, formerly known as Twitter: "From the river to the sea is an aspirational call for freedom, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, not death, destruction, or hate". She defended herself in an emotional address after the vote, US media reported. "It is important to separate people and governments," Tlaib said.

"No government is beyond criticism. The idea that criticizing the government of (the Zionist entity) is anti-Semitic sets a very dangerous precedent, and it's been used to silence diverse voices speaking up for human rights across our nation," she said. A censure does not equal an expulsion from the House but carries more weight than a reprimand.

It was the second time in two weeks Tlaib has faced formal disapproval over her criticism of the Zionist entity. Last week, Republican representative Marjorie Taylor Greene brought forward a more strongly worded resolution against Tlaib, which was blocked by the House, CNN reported. Tlaib is part of the progressive wing of the Democratic party, which includes representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ayanna Pressley. — AFP

BNK honors Asian Games champions with Volvo cars

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Chairman of BNK Group Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, recognizing the achievements of Kuwaiti Asian Games gold medalists Abdullah Al-Turqi, Yaqoub Al-Youha and Fahad Al-Ajmi at the Asian Games, honored each of them with a Volvo car. He emphasized the importance of encouraging youth and supporting their endeavors, both financially and morally. These athletes' success was attributed to the support of HH the Crown Prince and the Olympic Committee. This gesture by Kharafi symbolizes pride, in-

spiration and genuine appreciation.

Champion shooter Turqi expressed gratitude for the recognition, which motivates athletes to excel and represent their country. Champion hurdler Youha credited the celebration for fostering sports growth and inspiring the youth. Champion karateka Fahad Al-Ajmi shared his passion for the sport and the rigorous preparation that led to his success at the Asian Games.

The athletes praised Kharafi for his continuous support and called for more recognition to motivate the younger generation to pursue sports and positive endeavors. (See Page 16)



KUWAIT: Chairman of BNK Group Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi (center) and member of Kuwait Olympic Committee Fatima Hayat pose with Asian Games gold medalists Abdullah Al-Turqi (left), Yaqoub Al-Youha (second right) and Fahad Al-Ajmi (right). — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Massive destruction of Gaza housing war crime: UN expert

GENEVA: The Zionist entity's widespread and systematic bombardment of housing and civilian infrastructure in Gaza is a war crime, an independent UN expert said Wednesday. A month of Zionist strikes on targets within the Gaza Strip have destroyed or damaged 45 percent of all housing units in the Palestinian territory, Balakrishnan Rajagopal said, warning the destruction comes at a "tremendous cost to human life".

The UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing stressed that systematic or widespread bombardment of housing, civilian objects and infrastructure are strictly prohibited under international law. "Carrying out hostilities with the knowledge that they will systematically destroy and damage civilian housing and infrastructure, rendering an entire city — such as Gaza City — uninhabitable for civilians is a war crime," he said.

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: People gather by the rubble of a building that collapsed after Zionist bombardment while searching for survivors and bodies of victims in Khan Yunis on Nov 8, 2023. — AFP

Hottest October marks fifth record shattering month

PARIS: Last month was the hottest October on record globally, Europe's climate monitor said Wednesday, as months of exceptional heat likely to make 2023 the warmest year in history. With temperatures soaring beyond previous averages by exceptional margins, scientists say the pressure on world leaders to curb planet-heating greenhouse gas pollution has never been more urgent as they prepare to

meet in Dubai for the UNCOP28 climate conference this month.

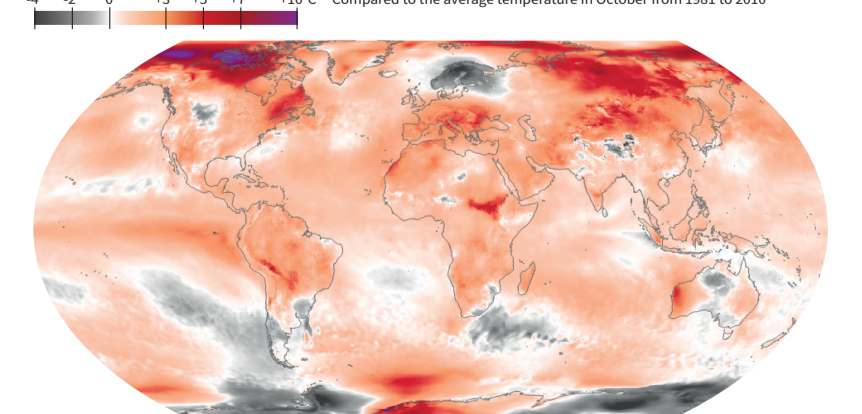
Drought parched parts of the United States and Mexico during October, while huge swaths of the planet saw wetter than normal conditions often linked to storms and cyclones, said the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S). Sea surface temperatures were the highest ever recorded for the month, a phenomenon driven by global warming that scientists say plays a key role in driving storms to be more ferocious and destructive.

"October 2023 has seen exceptional temperature anomalies, following on from four months of global

Continued on Page 6

Temperature anomalies in October 2023

Compared to the average temperature in October from 1981 to 2010



Source: Copernicus C3S/ECMWF

AFP



Sheikh Talal hails unified GCC efforts in bolstering security

Gulf Parliament Speakers voice outrage over Zionist aggression on Gaza

MUSCAT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah stressed Wednesday that the GCC has made great efforts in joint cooperation, which has had a great impact in raising the efficiency of security services and maintaining security and stability in the GCC countries.

Delivering a speech at the 40th meeting of GCC Interior Ministers at Muscat, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled called for continuing to strengthen the frameworks of cooperation and integration among the GCC countries to confront the challenges and move forward in combating cross-border organized crimes.

He also noted that there are those targeting the GCC countries with cyber-crimes by organized international gangs and professional hackers, which requires enhancing cybersecurity systems.

Kuwait has established a specialized center for cybersecurity and working to attract national competencies, he added.

He stressed the need to exert maximum cooperation and exchange of information between agencies concerned with cybersecurity so that the Gulf countries are resistant to security penetration of information and data.

Meanwhile, speakers and MPs of the GCC parliaments and Shura Councils expressed their anguish at the denunciation and destruction, forced displacement of Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip by Zionist occupation forces.

In a final communique read out by GCC Secretary General Jaseem Al-Budaiwi at the end of the speakers and presidents of the parliaments and Shura Councils' meeting held in Doha, they stressed their support to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinians' right to restore their legitimate rights regarding the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in line with the international resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, a two-state solution, the refugees' rights in accordance with the UN Gen-

eral Assembly Resolution No 149, and the release of captives.

The attendees were also briefed on the measures and steps taken on enhancing relations and sharing visits with the European Parliament, and the Latin and Caribbean group. In addition, they covered a mechanism on unifying the positions of the GCC member states towards the issues discussed at the international parliaments to achieve the GCC countries' goals, it noted.

The communique thanked Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad for the warm reception and hospitality that had a positive impact on making the conference successful.

Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Ahmad Al-Saadoun took part in the meeting. The delegation of Kuwaiti parliamentary caucus included MPs Hamad Al-Matar, Fahad Jamea, Shuaib Haabn and Dawood Maraie, as well as Secretary Mohammad Al-Mahan and Treasurer Hamad Al-Ubaid and others. — KUNA



MUSCAT: Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled addresses the 40th meeting of GCC Interior Ministers at Muscat on Wednesday. — KUNA



PARIS: Dr Adel Al-Mane addresses the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Wednesday. — KUNA

Kuwait urges UNESCO to approve bill on Zionist aggression

PARIS: Kuwait called on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to approve a bill on the consequences of the current situation in Gaza in the light of the Zionist occupation's continuous attacks. In a speech at the 42nd session of UNESCO's general conference on Wednesday, Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Mane called on all UNESCO member-countries to vote for approving the bill, involving the impact of Zionist entity's actions on the UNESCO's field of work in Gaza.

The bill includes protecting children's right of education, freedom of journalism and the lives and safety of journalists, he said. The Zionist entity attacks on innocent civilians in Gaza Strip is a violation of all international laws and conventions on human rights, said Al-Mane. Kuwait calls on the international society to cooperate in supporting the UNESCO's work and facilitate the execution of its duties, said the minister.

Education is a priority to Kuwait, as the country spends a large part of its budget on education, to develop society and ensure a bright future, the official noted. Kuwait is exerting great efforts to further develop the education field, as part of Kuwait Vision 2035, including preparing generations to engage in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies, he added.

The 42nd session of the UNESCO General Conference kicked off Tuesday, with Kuwait's participation, in Paris to discuss some topics. The delegations of 194 member states, and representatives of some international organizations and civil society organizations convened in Paris to focus on the organization's action in addressing global challenges and accelerated developments in the 21st century, topped with climate change and new technologies. — KUNA

Third stage of autumn begins on Nov 11

KUWAIT: Al-Ujairi Scientific Center has announced that the third stage of the autumn season, known as "Al-Ghafir", will commence on Nov 11 and extend for 13 days, marking the midpoint of the year. Following "Al-Ghafir", the season progresses into "Al-Wasam", which spans 52 days and signifies a general drop in temperatures.

In a statement to KUNA on Wednesday, the center explained that "Al-Ghafir" is the sixth stage of the autumn season, characterized by a notable increase in overall coolness, resulting in moderate daytime weather.

During this period, the nighttime hours continue to lengthen while the daytime hours decrease. The call to the afternoon prayer is at its earliest time for the year. The nighttime hours reach a duration of 13 hours and 12 minutes, and sunrise occurs at 6:08 minutes at the start of this period, extending to 6:19 minutes by its end. According to the agricultural calendar, this is an optimal time for planting various winter grains, as well as for fertilizing palm trees and tending to agricultural land. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The 16th relief plane from Kuwait carrying emergency humanitarian supplies to assist the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip took off on Wednesday to the Egyptian city of Al-Arish.

Kuwait's 16th relief plane for Gaza takes off

KUWAIT: The 16th relief plane from Kuwait carrying emergency humanitarian supplies to assist the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip took off on Wednesday to the Egyptian city of Al-Arish. Ten people are also on board.

Director of the Public Relations and Media Department at the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Khaled Al-Zaid, told KUNA before the take-off that this relief air bridge comes as a continuation of the efforts undertaken by Kuwait in providing relief and medical assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip which is in the midst of an unprecedented

humanitarian crisis following the continuous bombardments by the Zionist entity.

Al-Zaid added that the Kuwaiti air bridge is continuing to provide relief to the brothers in Gaza who are suffering from harrowing humanitarian conditions as a result of the Zionist entity's relentless attacks that have been going on for more than 32 days, leaving thousands of people killed and rendering thousands wounded, most of whom are children and women.

He pointed out the necessity of allowing the delivery of aid to all parts of Gaza in a safe and secure manner, especially to the health sector, which is in dire need of supplies including diesel and other energy sources.

Director of disaster and emergency management at the Association, Youssef Al-Maraj said that the medical and food aid sent by Kuwait was in coordination with the Red Crescent Society. Al-Maraj added that Kuwait is keen to provide all possible support to enhance the humanitarian response to help the broth-

ers in Gaza and provide the necessary needs for the population and support relief centers, refugee shelters and hospitals. He stated that the "Help Palestine" campaign, through the association's website, aims to deliver humanitarian aid to thousands of affected people and includes providing food supplies, medical aid, and assistance to families affected by the bombing and destruction caused by the aggression.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society announced on Wednesday the distribution of relief aid to the displaced in the Al-Mahra governorate in Yemen, which was exposed to Hurricane Tej that struck the region. Recently, it destroyed the infrastructure and agricultural crops. The head of the field team at the association, Khaled Al-Mutairi, said in a statement to KUNA that the association is one of the first organizations that was keen to provide relief, health and development aid to the brotherly Yemeni people. — KUNA



AIU Film Festival returns: Cinescape strategic partner

KUWAIT: After a very successful event just last year, the AIU Film Festival returned to the American International University campus in Kuwait which started on Nov 5 and lasts until Nov 11. The festival promises to be a cinematic extravaganza once again, full of excitement and creative energy. For film enthusiasts, gear up for an immersive experience which is not only a showcase of films, but a celebration of storytelling, visual artistry and the magic of the silver screen.

This event is bigger, better and even more captivating than its predecessor, which was a very successful inaugural event last year. This year included seasoned professionals who are taking part in the screenings, workshops, and lectures until November 9.

Cinescape has joined efforts with AIU as a strategic partner in the Film Festival, helping to enhance the festival's scope and reach by hosting screenings at their venues in Assima Mall and 360 Mall. This collaboration aimed to engage a larger youth audience in Kuwait. Cinescape's experts will also serve as speakers, sharing valuable industry insights to elevate the festival's quality and reach. In addition to Cinescape, AIU has also partnered with several esteemed sponsors – Debenhams, Weyay and Ali Alghanim & Sons – who have all generously supported the festival and demonstrated their commitment to the promotion of culture and arts, within Kuwait and beyond.

The speakers included award-winning Director, Dr Zeyad Al-Husaini, Deputy General Manager of Programs and Marketing at the Kuwait National Cinema Company, Ghalia Hayat, Director at the Bustop Cre-



ative Agency, Tarek Jammal, Director of Photography at Ethos, Aida Al-Zanki, Director Maryam Al-Abbad, Screenwriter Mohammed Al-Mayahi, and Executive Director Maryam Faisal Al-Omani. It also includes Creative Director, Costume and Set Designer Fay Faisal Al-Homoud, Producer, Director and Musician, Sayood and Co-Founder of Sinbad Pictures, Faisal Al Agel.

The first four days of the Festival were exciting with lectures that kept everyone excited and on the edge of their seats. It began with Dr Zeyad Al-Husaini as he spoke about his popular film, "How I Got There" and the process he went through from script to film on Nov 5.

The next day was busy with two lectures as Aida Al-Zanki took the stage to give tips on "How to Get Into the Industry" before Mohammed Al-Mayahi spoke about "The Art of Storytelling". November 8 saw two speakers as Tarek Jammal talked about "Framing the Emotions" while Maryam Al-Abbad tackled a critical topic focused on "Women in the Industry". Last but certainly not the least was Sayood and he spoke about what made him the person he is today with the "Art of Animation".

Throughout the festival week, the AIU Film Festival will of course, be showing screenings of films daily from 9:30-10:30 am and from 12:30-1:30 pm. "The Moon Follows Me", "Night", "Aalish", "Traffic", "The Mist"



and many more captivating films await the screen.

This year's film festival received an overwhelming response from filmmakers worldwide, with over 3,000 films submitted from over 114 countries. The selection process was rigorous, resulting in the showcasing of over 40 outstanding films that will be shown throughout the festival, which encompasses a wide spectrum of genres and styles, promising to captivate audiences and spark meaningful conversations.

What makes this festival particularly thrilling is the convergence of emerging talents and seasoned veterans all under one roof to exchange ideas, learn, and find various ways to grow. The screenings are not just about watching a film, it's a shared exploration of the art form and the different ways storytelling can be effective.

The festival is planned to be concluded with an Award Ceremony taking place on November 11 to close the curtains on an educational, fun and engaging week. The AIU Film Festival is one that no one should miss as it promises to be a hub of artistic exchange, workshops, discussions and interactive sessions that delve deeply into the intricacies of filmmaking. It's an opportunity for attendees to deepen their understanding of the craft, learn from established professionals, and perhaps even discover the spark that ignites their own creative journey.

Local

MoH to develop exam centers abroad for expat recruitments

Kuwait hosts GCC workshop for members of technical committees

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health affirmed its keenness to develop the skills and capabilities of the technical committees responsible for evaluating and accrediting medical examination centers for expatriates in labor-exporting countries in order to preserve the health of society.

The ministry said in a statement to KUNA on Wednesday that Kuwait hosted, in this regard, a Gulf workshop for members of technical committees for training on evaluating and accrediting medical examination centers, organized by the Health Council for the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

It explained that the workshop was organized in coordination with the ministry's public health sector and discussed the most prominent amendments and additions to the new regulations for medical examination for those coming to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries for work or residence. It also discussed the standards for accrediting medical examination centers.

The workshop aimed to develop regulation and improve the evaluation process of labor examination centers in order to increase the quality

of the examination process and ensure the accuracy of its results.

During the workshop, participants were trained on how to evaluate examination centers. The ministry stated that the expatriate worker examination program aims to ensure the health fitness of expatriate workers and that they are free from chronic diseases that constitute an economic burden, and also that they are free from infectious diseases that may pose a danger to those in contact and to society before coming to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The Ministry of Health stressed the importance of such meetings that aim to strengthen joint relations, deepen ties between the GCC countries, strengthen cooperation frameworks, and unify efforts to achieve the highest levels of quality and excellence in the fields of preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services for citizens of the GCC countries.

The statement indicated that this is being done by developing the system and mechanisms of joint Gulf health work in setting health requirements and controls for medical examination for expatriates. — KUNA



Kuwait hosted a Gulf workshop for members of technical committees for training on evaluating and accrediting medical examination centers. — KUNA

OAPEC chief, Japan's Ambassador discuss boosting cooperation

KUWAIT: Secretary General of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, Jamal Al-Loughani, discussed with Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Morino Yasunari on Wednesday the means of boosting cooperation between the organization and establishment of similar activity in Japan.

In a press release, OAPEC mentioned that Al-Loughani commended the strong relations between the organization and Japanese authorities in the fields of energy and petroleum industries. Al-Loughani recalled a Memorandum of Understanding signed by OAPEC and Japan Cooperation Center for Petroleum in 2011, which culminated in various joint conferences and forums on refineries and petrochemicals.

He noted the secretariat's invitation to the Cooperation Center's chief to attend 12th Arab Energy Forum, saying it is a reaffirmation of OAPEC's keen-



KUWAIT: Jamal Al-Loughani (left) with Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Morino Yasunari on Wednesday. — KUNA

ness on strengthening relationships. The Secretary General also underlined necessity to unifying positions in relation to climate change issues, especially for upcoming COP28 session, to be held in

the United Arab Emirates this month. The Japanese Ambassador underscored the benefits of bilateral relations for both sides and hailed organization's efforts in cementing such ties. — KUNA

KOTC bags IMO's award for maritime educational training

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company on Tuesday received a prized award for its educational maritime field training program in the maritime industry for Middle East and the Indian subcontinent region for the year 2023. It was awarded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). A press statement issued by KOTC said that the IMO's evaluation is considered significant when it comes to the maritime transport field.

Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Khaled Ahmed received the award during the ceremony that was held on Wednesday in Dubai, under the benediction of Dubai's Civil Aviation Chairman and Airlines CEO, Sheikh Ahmad bin Saeed.

The award considered is a feat to be supplemented to the many KOTC accomplishments making way for further progress and more endeavors putting the company's reputation on a scale to be measured on a regional and international standard, said Sheikh Khaled. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company on Tuesday receives a prized award for its educational maritime field training program in the maritime industry. — KUNA



Burgan Bank hosts 'Risk Culture Week'

KUWAIT: Stemming from its commitment to banking excellence, Burgan Bank hosted Risk Culture Week, an event that aims to raise awareness of the latest global market standards for risk management across different departments and employment grades. This is in line with Burgan's strategy for human capital development and its commitment to meeting industry best

practices, as the Bank seeks to equip all staff with the latest market knowledge that enables them to carry out their responsibilities with uncompromised quality.

Commenting on the weeklong event, Fadel Abdullah, Acting Chief Executive Officer – Kuwait at Burgan Bank, said: "The past few years have reminded us that success in the banking and financial industry isn't defined by how an institution performs when everything is going right, but how it reacts when markets are disrupted. To remain a trusted financial partner to our customers, it is crucial that risk management becomes second nature to all of our staff, ensuring that

they make sound decisions that have the best interest of our customers at heart no matter how steady or turbulent the market is."

Abdullah went on to note that risk culture goes beyond learning the latest market trends and adopting state-of-the-art analytic tools and software. "To succeed at instilling the risk and control culture at Burgan Bank, it is essential to also reinforce our institutional values that underscore ownership, responsibility, and accountability."

Throughout Risk Culture Week, Burgan Bank organized several workshops and seminars that tackled different aspects of risk management in the banking industry, including case stud-

ies and emerging risk trends on topics such as ESG risks, cyber security, and innovation risks. Across the Bank, 343 employees participated in the workshops and seminars, which were delivered by distinguished internal and external experts. In addition, the week offered numerous activities and events that were designed to engage the employees in a proactive and inclusive atmosphere. It serves to note that Burgan Bank introduced the Risk Culture Program in 2021 and has since spared no effort to ensure that all employees comply with its recommendations and guidelines, enabling short-term and long-term success for the Bank and utmost satisfaction for its customers.

14th Kuwaiti Week activities kick off in Cairo

CAIRO: The 14th Kuwaiti Week activities were launched in Egypt with the participation of 80 organizations and delegations from both Kuwaiti and Egyptian sides. The opening ceremony was attended by Egypt's Minister of Finance Mohamed Maaat, the Minister of Trade and Industry, Eng Ahmed Samir, the Minister of State for Immigration and Affairs of Egyptians Abroad, Soha El Gendy, senior officials, parliamentarians, and members of the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo.

More than 80 Kuwaiti and Egyptian organizations and delegations are participating in the exhibition, including the Martyr's Office, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense, and the Association for Martyrs and Families and Kuwait Airways, the League of Arab States and EgyptAir among others. Also participating in the exhibition are the Kuwaiti Office for Charitable Projects in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Military Production, the General Authority for the Promotion of Tourism, the State Information Service, the Projects Development Agency, the Kuwaiti Public Relations Society, and others. — KUNA



CAIRO: Inauguration of the 14th Kuwaiti Week activities in Cairo. — KUNA photos



MoD participates in GCC conference on digital health

KUWAIT: The Undersecretary of the Kuwait Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah participated in the sixth Conference for the Development of the Workforce in the Field of Digital Health In the Gulf Cooperation Council countries which was hosted by Dubai with wide international participation.

The Ministry of Defense said in a press statement on Wednesday that the conference was held last week with the participation of the World Health Organization, governmental and academic institutions, healthcare organizations, and a number of health policy makers around the world. It witnessed the discussion of specialized topics and the presentation of lectures in the field of technological advancement for the various stages of Zamam 2023.

It added that the conference also dealt with research related topics of revolutionary technology, digital health, health information exchange (HIE), public health, artificial intelligence, data management, and workforce development.

The statement explained that Zamam is the Gulf Cooperation Council task force on workforce development in the field of digital healthcare is a non-profit initiative that seeks to create sustainable digital health ecosystems. It stated that this is done by providing sufficient supplies of a skilled and capable local digital workforce with the aim of developing a competency-based framework for developing specialists in Digital health and career paths that ensure a future-ready workforce. — KUNA

Kuwait oil price drops

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$1.82 to \$88.07 per barrel on Tuesday in contrast to \$89.89 pb last Monday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday. At the global scale, the price of the Brent crude saw a drop by \$3.57 to \$81.61 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which fell by \$3.45 to \$77.37 pb. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Flamingos feeding off a beach north of Kuwait City on November 8, 2023. — Photo by Passant Hisham

MoH launches latest device for imaging tumors and infections

Device marks a major development in Kuwait's radiologic technology



The latest device for imaging tumors and infections (PET/MRI).

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health launched at Al-Jahra Hospital, the latest device for imaging tumors and infections (PET/MRI), which is the first of its kind in Kuwait and constituted a major development in the world of radiology. It is one of the most accurate examination devices with a high diagnostic value.

The head of the Nuclear Medicine Department



MoH officials with Nuclear Medicine Department specialists at New Jahra Hospital. — KUNA photos

at Jahra Hospital, Dr Muhammad Al-Shaheen, told KUNA that this device is considered the latest technology for nuclear and diagnostic imaging and is the first of its kind in Kuwait.

The technique combines the use of positron emission and magnetic resonance imaging to evaluate and diagnose cases. Al-Shaheen added that this combination provides accurate images of tissues using magnetic resonance images and accurately determines the metabolic activity of cells, which provides a more accurate diagnosis than performing either of the two examinations separately. For his part, the head of the unit said Medical physicist at the hospital, Dr Mishari Al-Naimi, told KUNA that the celebration included holding a workshop on (positron imaging technology combined with magnetic resonance imaging), organized by the Department of Nuclear Medicine in cooperation with the Medical Physics Unit and the International Atomic Energy Agency, with the participation of experts from Germany and Austria to introduce this technology and its most important applications.

Al-Naimi explained that the workshop will discuss this advanced technology that combines the advantages of magnetic resonance imaging and positron imaging in one device, allowing the possibility of accurate detection and early diagnosis of tumors, neurological diseases and vascular diseases, in addition to reducing the rate of radiation to the patient, especially children, by up to 70 percent compared to examinations.



The national liaison officer for the International Atomic Energy Agency, Dr Nader Al-Awadhi, said that the agency is keen to train workers in this field on the latest uses of nuclear techniques and the uses of positron imaging combined with magnetic resonance imaging in diagnosing diseases. Al-Awadhi said that this technology relies on the use of medical radioactive materials that are used to diagnose and treat diseases, as well as its reliance on the ability of radioactive materials to emit radiation, which can be used to create images of the body or to kill cancer cells. He stated that the workshop aims to exchange information about the uses of positron imaging combined with magnetic resonance imaging and raise awareness of the authorities. — KUNA

NBK sponsors KCST's 2nd Career Fair

KUWAIT: In line with its leading role in supporting national talent, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is always keen to support fresh graduates as they navigate their way into the labor market. In this context, the bank sponsored the 2nd Career Fair of Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST).

NBK's participation reflects its keen endeavors to support the Kuwaiti youth, attract high-caliber national talent and provide suitable job opportunities for them in the vital banking sector. Through these sponsorships, NBK aims to open direct communication channels between private sector companies and job seekers, as well as encourage fresh graduates to navigate their way into the labor market. In addition, these career fairs serve as important platforms for the bank to select and recruit national talent.

On this occasion, Jarrah Al-Shatti, Senior Talent Acquisition Officer at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK continues to solidify its leading role among private sector institutions in attracting, training, upskilling national talent and qualifying them to join the banking sector, within its endeavors to build high-caliber young professionals who can take on leading positions in the future."

"NBK provides a unique work environment that promotes diversity and equal opportunities, and of-



fers the best-in-class training and development programs for employees for a thriving career. This makes NBK the employer of choice in the private sector for Kuwaiti fresh graduates," he added. NBK offers training programs for young Kuwaiti fresh graduates and students, to equip them with the expertise, professional knowledge, and on-job training, as professional preparation for them to navigate their way into the labor market, reflecting its role as one of the key supporters of the youth among private sector institutions in Kuwait," he noted. NBK's endeavors to attract national talent go in line with its development and training plans aimed to invest in national cadres and prepare a promising banking generation. The bank also provides consistent sponsorship of annual career fairs to help the youth, particularly fresh graduates, find the right job.



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Scientists blame climate change for 'extreme drought' in Mideast

Gazans raise white flags to flee Zionist onslaught

'We are not terrorists - we are civilians - we want to live in peace'

GAZA: Clutching makeshift white flags, Gazans made their way in between dead bodies and Zionist troops on Tuesday as they followed the Zionist orders to flee across the Palestinian territory. "It was so scary," said Ola al-Ghul, one of the masses of Gazan civilians displaced in the month-old war between Israel and Hamas. "We held our hands up and we kept walking. There were so many of us, we were holding white flags," she told AFP.

The majority of the Gaza Strip's 2.4 million residents have been displaced by the fighting, with around 1.5 million fleeing within the territory according to the United Nations. Clutching one of her toddlers, Amira al-Sakani recalled the Zionist entity's repeated air drops of flyers, seen by AFP, telling civilians to flee to the south. "We came by foot from the center of Gaza to the south," she said. "I was not expecting the distance to be that long." On the way, Sakani saw "bodies of martyrs, some in pieces". "We want peace, enough is enough, we are tired, we want a happy future," she said.

More than 10,300 people have been killed across the Gaza Strip, according to Gaza's health ministry, mostly civilians, including more than 4,200 children. The bombardment came in response to the October 7 attacks by Hamas, which left around 1,400 people dead in the Zionist entity, also mostly civilians, according to Zionist officials. The Zionist entity's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas.

Sakani said her children have by now learnt what bombs are: "They tell me:

'That's dangerous mum, I don't want any strikes.'" Those seen fleeing by AFP journalists had few belongings with them, while some carried children or were using wheelchairs.

'It was really horrible'

Haitham Nouredine said he walked four kilometers (2.5 miles) with his mother and other relatives until they reached the southern Bureij refugee camp. He told AFP the family left their Gaza City home near Al-Shifa hospital, due to the heavy bombardment in the area, and saw decomposing bodies en route.

The Zionist military says its troops have encircled Gaza City but will allow civilians to leave the north. But casualty figures show no area in the territory is safe, with nearly 3,600 people killed in southern and central Gaza, according to health ministry data.

Holding a walking stick, Hatim Abu Riash recounted his fear of walking past Zionist forces. "Next to the soldiers, next to the guns, next to the tanks, the airplane ... it was really horrible," he said, after fleeing the northern Jabalia refugee camp, which has been repeatedly bombed since the start of the assault. "We are not terrorists — we are civilians — we want to live in peace," he added.

The Gazans' plight does not end once they flee to central or southern areas, where more than 550,000 people are sheltering in 92 establishments run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). Facilities are limited and disease is rife. In one, UNRWA reported that more than 600 people



GAZA: A Palestinian boy carries a makeshift white flag as he arrives with his mother near the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Nov 6, 2023. — AFP

were sharing one toilet.

There are also thousands of cases of acute respiratory illness, skin infections, diarrhea and chicken pox, the UN says,

while accessing basic supplies such as bread has become tough. Standing on a dual carriageway as fellow Gazans walked past, resident Motaz El-Ajala

described the conditions as "inhumane". "The situation is catastrophic," he told AFP, as an elderly woman was pushed past in a baby's buggy. — AFP



TOKYO: (From left) High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani pose for a family photo during their G7 foreign ministers' meetings. — AFP

G7 foreign ministers back 'humanitarian pauses' in Gaza

TOKYO: G7 foreign ministers said Wednesday that they supported "humanitarian pauses and corridors" in Gaza but refrained from calling for a ceasefire.

The group also said after talks in Japan that their support for Ukraine in its war with Russia "will never waver" while calling on China not to support Moscow in the conflict.

"We stress the need for urgent action to address the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Gaza ... We support humanitarian pauses and corridors to facilitate urgently needed assistance, civilian movement, and the release of hostages," a joint statement said.

The ministers also "emphasize (the Zionist entity's) right to defend itself and its people in accordance with international law as it seeks to prevent a recurrence" of the Oct 7 Hamas attacks. It added: "We call on Iran to refrain from providing support for Hamas and taking further actions that destabilize the Middle East, including support for Lebanese Hezbollah and other non-state actors, and to use its influence with those groups to de-escalate regional tensions."

Paris anti-Semitic graffiti likely ordered from abroad

PARIS: The daubing of dozens of Stars of David on buildings in Paris and its suburbs, widely condemned as anti-Semitic, may have been carried out at the "express demand" of an individual residing abroad, the Paris prosecutor said Tuesday. An investigating magistrate will now probe what was the intention of the mass daubing of buildings with the stars, prosecutor Laure Beccuau said in a statement, following

the arrest of two Moldovans who told investigators they were acting at the behest of a third party. Beccuau said that around 60 Stars of David had been found daubed on walls in Paris on the morning of October 31 and similar stars also found in outlying regions. Video footage showed that these inscriptions were made by a woman and man during a single trip, watched by a third person who took photographs. These two individuals swiftly left French territory. But a link was established with similar images daubed four days earlier which led to the arrest of the two Moldovans in the 10th district of Paris on Oct 27 she said. "They said they acted on the command of a third party for remuneration, which was backed up by a Russian-language conversation on their telephone," she said. — AFP

Ukraine fatigue
On the Ukraine war, the G7 statement said: "Our steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine's fight for its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity will never waver." "We further call on China not to assist Russia in its war against Ukraine, to press Russia to stop its military aggression, and to support a just and lasting peace in Ukraine," it said.

The ministers from the G7 — the United States, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Britain and Canada — also said they "welcome China's participation in the Ukraine-led peace process". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed what he called a "strong statement" by the group and for its "unwavering support", after his Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba had joined the meeting by video conference.

With Ukraine's counteroffensive struggling to gain ground after almost two years of war, Zelensky has regularly met Western leaders to try to stave off fatigue over the conflict. "It is clear, particularly at this moment, that around the world some (parties) are watching very closely how we will continue to support Ukraine," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said earlier.

Her French counterpart Catherine Colonna said it was "important to remember that the situation in the Middle East in no way distracts us from what is happening in Ukraine". — AFP



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TIME
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LOCATION
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CATEGORIES
5K | 10K | KIDS



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International

UK Labour Party in turmoil over leader's stance on Gaza

Top party member quits in protest at leader's refusal to call for ceasefire

LONDON: A row over the UK main opposition Labour leader's stance on the Zionist war on Hamas escalated Wednesday, with the resignation of one of the party's top team.

Keir Starmer, who looks set to become Britain's next prime minister at an election expected next year, according to polling, has refused to call for a permanent ceasefire. Instead, the former human rights lawyer has called for a humanitarian pause to the Zionist entity's bombardment to allow much-needed aid to reach Palestinians unable to leave the coastal enclave. His stance, however, has caused disquiet within the party.

Late on Tuesday, shadow minister Imran Hussain quit Labour's front bench in protest at Starmer's refusal to heed calls from many in his party to push for a Zionist ceasefire. About 50 Labour Party councillors, many Muslim, had earlier resigned from party itself over Starmer's position, with some even calling for him to step down.

In a letter to Starmer, Hussain, the party's spokesman on workers' rights, said he wanted to be a strong advocate for a humanitarian ceasefire.

"A ceasefire is essential to ending the bloodshed, to ensuring that enough aid can pass into Gaza and

reach those most in need, and to help ensure the safe return of the Israeli hostages," he wrote.

Hussain added that he "unequivocally condemned" Hamas's Oct 7 attacks and firmly agreed that "every country has the right to defend itself". But he said this could "never become a right to deliberately violate international law on protecting civilians or to commit war crimes".

'Massive divisions'

According to Al Jazeera, Starmer's woes began after he gave an interview to British broadcaster LBC several weeks ago, in which he appeared to endorse Israel's military tactic of withholding water and electricity from the people of Gaza. The presenter asked him if "cutting off power, cutting off water" was an appropriate response to the Oct 7 Hamas attacks.

Starmer replied, "I think that (The Zionist entity) does have that right ... It is an ongoing situation. Obviously, everything should be done within international law." Starmer later tried to clarify his remarks, saying he understood his words had caused "real concern and distress in some Muslim communities".

"Let me clear about what I was saying, and what I wasn't saying," he said. "I was saying (the Zionist



BEDFORD: Britain's main opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer smiles as he meets supporters on Oct 20, 2023. — AFP

entity) had the right to self-defense. When I said that right, it was that right to self-defense ... I was not saying (the Zionist entity) had the right to cut off water, food, fuel, or medicines, on the contrary."

But the damage had already been done. "The (Labour) resignations show the massive divisions

within the party," Chris Doyle, director of the London-based Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU), told Al Jazeera.

Afrasiab Anwar, the Labour leader of Burnley Council, in England's northwest, is among those who have resigned. Quitting was "the most difficult decision" of his political career, he told Al Jazeera.

"It was the LBC interview that sparked it all," said Anwar, who believes Starmer has "failed" at Labour leader's first real foreign policy test. "And his response to that and the backlash which came from that. He's been trying to recover [ever since] and has failed to do so." Starmer, who took over from hard-left former leader Jeremy Corbyn in 2020, has faced a deepening battle to maintain discipline in his top team on the Gaza conflict. At least 16 of his shadow cabinet have either called for a ceasefire or shared others' calls on social media.

A Labour spokesman said a ceasefire would freeze the conflict and "leave hostages in Gaza and Hamas with the infrastructure and capability to carry out the sort of attack we saw on Oct 7". "International law must be followed at all times and innocent civilians must be protected. Labour is calling for humanitarian pauses in the fighting." — Agencies

Philippine typhoon survivors pray for victims on anniversary

TACLOBAN: Survivors of Super Typhoon Haiyan prayed for their dead loved ones in the devoutly Catholic Philippines on Wednesday as they commemorated the 10th anniversary of a storm that killed more than 6,000 people.

Haiyan, one of the strongest storms ever recorded, unleashed winds of up to 315 kilometers (195 miles) an hour and whipped up tsunami-like waves that devastated central islands in the archipelago nation. Tacloban, the capital of Leyte province, bore the brunt of the storm's fury and was almost totally destroyed by five-meter-high storm surges that crashed over mostly poor coastal communities.

People returned a decade later to Tacloban's seaside convention center — which was used as an evacuation site during Haiyan — for a Catholic mass to remember the victims and pay tribute to those who helped rebuild the city. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos attended the ceremony along with members of his Cabinet, foreign diplomats and survivors of the storm.

"Ten years have gone by, and yet the memory of this tragedy remains indelible in our hearts and in our thoughts," Marcos told the audience. He said the Philippines — typically affected by more than 20 major storms a year — needed to build "stronger and more resilient communities" in the face of climate change, which scientists have long warned is making storms more powerful. "Be assured that the government is always striving to ensure that such tragedies of this magnitude will be avoided and will be adapted to," he said. "We must make climate change a vital component of our national policies."

'It will never be forgotten'

Stormy clouds hung over the city of around



TACLOBAN: People place LED candles during a vigil in memory of Super Typhoon Haiyan victims. — AFP

280,000 people on Wednesday, adding to the somber atmosphere of the anniversary. About 6,300 people were killed by Haiyan, and a decade later more than a thousand are still missing. More than four million people were left homeless.

Some residents placed lit candles in the streets in the evening in remembrance of the people lost in the disaster. Marlon Tano, 56, thought he was going to die during Haiyan when surprising storm surges swamped the building where he had sought shelter. Steel bars on the windows trapped him and others inside. "We did not expect the water to enter the building," Tano told AFP on Wednesday as he recalled the traumatic events. "I was able to rescue maybe six children. I rode a sofa or cabinet that was floating and was able to reach the ceiling."

Tano planned to light candles in his street and "pray for the souls of the Typhoon Yolanda victims", he said, using the Philippines' name for the storm. Despite the huge loss of life and property, Vicar General Erlito Maraya, who led Wednesday's mass,

told the audience at the convention center "there is life after Yolanda". "No wind or water, no matter how strong, can wash our faith away," Maraya said, attributing the resilience of the survivors to their deep religious beliefs.

A few people holding umbrellas for the occasional shower of rain visited a cemetery in Tacloban where hundreds of people killed in Haiyan are buried. Residents left flowers and lit candles at a memorial plaque with the names of victims, or sat next to one of the white crosses marking a loved one's final resting place.

Yolanda Billones, a mother of 12, left a bouquet of white flowers for her 15-year-old son Riojen. "I have accepted that he is gone and there is nothing I can do," said Billones, 58. Even after so many years, May Flor Ramirez, 39, said the memories of Haiyan were still strong, as was the sadness she felt for the loss of one of her siblings and their family. "For me the pain has not really gone away," the mother of seven told AFP. "It will never be forgotten." — AFP

Cambodia deports 25 Japanese online scam suspects

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: Cambodia deported 25 Japanese people on Wednesday who were suspected of involvement in online scam operations. Criminal networks have set up numerous compounds in Cambodia, Myanmar and elsewhere to run online scams fleecing victims for large sums of money.

Most have targeted Chinese victims, but experts warn that Japan's "yakuza" mobsters are getting increasingly involved. Keo Vanthan, a spokesman for Cambodian immigration police, told AFP the 25 suspects were arrested in Phnom Penh in September for "online scams" at the request of Japanese authorities. Chhay Kim Khoeun, Cambodia's National Police spokesman, said the suspects targeted people in Japan. "They committed some activities that affect the interests of Japanese people," he told AFP.

The yakuza emerged from the tumult of post-war Japan, becoming multibillion-dollar criminal organizations involved in gambling, drugs, prostitution, loan sharking, protection rackets and white-collar crime. "Like other crime groups in East Asia they have been under pressure at home and looking for opportunities, and Southeast Asia and in particular the Mekong have been an attractive place to do business," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime deputy regional representative Benedikt Hofmann said. He said yakuza activity started picking up around 2017 and has become more significant in the past year or two. In 2018, a retired Japanese crime boss was arrested in Thailand after more than 14 years on the run after photos of his "yakuza" tattoos and a missing little finger went viral. — AFP

Massive destruction of Gaza housing...

Continued from Page 1

When such acts are "directed against a civilian population, they also amount to crimes against humanity", he said. Rajagopal stressed that civilian housing in the Zionist entity was also not a military object, warning that Hamas' continuing indiscriminate launching of rockets from Gaza and elsewhere also constituted "a war crime". According to the health ministry in Gaza, the Zionist entity's bombardment has killed more than 10,500 people, most of them women and children. Nearly 2,500 others, more than half of them children, have been reported missing and are most likely trapped under the rubble.

Rajagopal, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, had previously coined the term "domicide" to refer to the systematic and widespread attacks on civilian housing

and infrastructure that cause death and suffering. Domicide, he said, "is now being committed in Gaza".

Around 1.5 million people have been displaced in Gaza amid the destruction and Zionist calls to evacuate the entire north of the territory, according to UN figures. Rajagopal said the Zionist evacuation order, issued despite a lack of adequate shelter and aid for those fleeing and while cutting off water, food, fuel and medicine and repeatedly attacking evacuation routes and "safe zones", was "a cruel and blatant violation of international humanitarian law".

He said international humanitarian law is based on the distinction between civilian and military objects. "Apartment buildings are not military objects. Hospitals and ambulances are not military objects. Refugee camps are not military objects," he said. The expert insisted that even when combatants take shelter in civilian housing, as alleged in recent attacks on the Jabalia refugee camp, there is no justification for attacking entire apartment blocks housing civilians. "No asserted right of self-defense under international law can cover such attacks," he said, adding that this was especially true "in the context of an occupation". — AFP

added, registering 1.43C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average. Beyond these official records, scientists say proxy data for the climate going back further — like tree rings or ice cores — suggests the temperatures seen this year could be unprecedented in human history, potentially the warmest in more than 100,000 years.

Average sea surface temperatures for the month excluding the polar regions also reached all-time highs for October, at 20.79C. Oceans have absorbed 90 percent of the excess heat produced by human activity since the dawn of the industrial age, according to scientists. Warmer oceans are linked to an increase in the intensity of storms and the melting of crucial ice shelves buffering the vast ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica, threatening destructive sea level rise. A warmer atmosphere also holds more moisture, resulting in heavier rainfall.

Leaders meeting in the United Arab Emirates for the Nov 30 to Dec 12 COP28 conference will have to respond to a damning progress report on the world's Paris pledges after major scientific reports have made clear that the world is far off track. Carbon emissions — largely from fossil fuels — continue to creep up when they need to be slashed in half this decade. Just under 1.2 degrees Celsius of temperature rise above pre-industrial levels has triggered a range of calamitous and costly weather extremes. — AFP

Black US activists find common cause with Palestinians

NEW YORK: Marching in Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 was the first time AnnEliza Canning-Skinner "experienced what solidarity is," she says. Fast-forward three years and the 28-year-old has been a regular on the streets of New York, marching in support of Palestinians as the Zionist entity's bombing campaign of the Gaza Strip hits the one-month-mark.

Canning-Skinner is one of thousands of demonstrators across the United States who've turned out for protests, with appeals including a ceasefire of deadly violence in Gaza and an end to US funding of the Zionist military. And increasingly demonstrators stateside are drawing clear connections between the Palestinian and black liberation movements.

At a recent protest in Brooklyn, Canning-Skinner, a black woman, marched alongside fellow protesters who hoisted signs with messages including "Black Lives 4 Palestine" and "White Silence Is Violence". "It all correlates," Canning-Skinner told AFP. The historic roots of solidarity between black organizers and Palestinians run deep, but both activists and scholars say events in recent years have crystallized the parallels for protesters.

"In terms of doing the kind of ideological work to convince people that Palestine is an issue that they ought to take up, I think Black Lives Matter has been tremendously important," Derek Ide, a historian at the University of Michigan focused on the topic, told AFP. "There are more people out in the streets and that is definitely a result of the kind of organizing that Black activists have been doing alongside Palestinian groups and organizations."

Dating back to the 19th century, some black nationalist thinkers found inspiration in the Zionist cause for a Jewish state, seeing an analog of their own vision for a black homeland. But with the mid-20th century emergence of the Black Power and anti-war movements, "it became much more common in African American activist circles to understand the Palestinians as an oppressed people," explained Sam Klug, an African American studies historian focused on decolonization.

The 1967 Six-Day War marked an important turning point, he said, noting the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) — a major organizing force during the US Civil Rights Movement — published a primer that "took a really strong pro-Palestinian stance". It "described a kind of shared condition of oppression and occupation

among African Americans, Palestinians and a kind of global colonial community."

Decades later, the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri triggered mass protests over racism and state violence, as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement started gaining national attention. That same summer the Zionist entity launched a seven-week military campaign against Gaza: "Seeing these two things happen simultaneously... solidified that these were united struggles" for many activists, historian Ide said. "We saw a kind of flurry of action and dialogue between protesters in Ferguson as well as Palestinians in Gaza... sharing tactics and strategies and stories of repression and resistance to oppression."

The 2020 police murder of George Floyd even further galvanized anti-racism efforts in the United States, sparking an enormous protest movement. Once more, Palestinians posted advice online on how to deal with tactics deployed by riot police, including rubber-coated bullets and tear gas. For Klug, "it's hard to imagine" the current protests in the United States reaching their current scope without BLM. "It's certainly not the only factor," he said. "But I do think it's an important one."

Several recent demonstrators interviewed by AFP drew connections between Zionist law enforcement and US police, in particular pointing to programs that see US officers train alongside Zionist counterparts. Prior to the current war, the Zionist entity already had been carrying out stepped-up military raids, some including deadly force against civilians.

Klug pointed to "a clear shared visual language that people can see when (Zionist) security services are brutalizing Palestinian civilians, that Americans have become very familiar with from the scenes of white police officers committing acts of violence against African American civilians." Such factors can help explain in part why American public opinion on the Palestinian cause, particularly among young people, has warmed in recent years, in a country whose governmental support for the Zionist entity is unwavering.

Klug said the uprising over George Floyd and the BLM activism that preceded it has shifted the Palestinian conversation for many black activists — but also more broadly "among younger Americans of all races". He pointed to growing activism on the left among anti-Zionist Jewish groups, including Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, both of which have taken a strong organizing role in recent weeks.

For Jo Beharzin, who cited BLM organizing as inspiration for marching in a recent Manhattan demonstration for Gaza, it's a question of "global solidarity". The 25-year-old noted the international support for BLM in 2020: "I want to reciprocate that, as part of the continued global movement against white supremacy and colonialism." — AFP

Hottest October marks fifth record...

Continued from Page 1

temperature records being obliterated," said Samantha Burgess, C3S Deputy Director. "We can say with near certainty that 2023 will be the warmest year on record, and is currently 1.43 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average. The sense of urgency for ambitious climate action going into COP28 has never been higher."

The landmark Paris Agreement saw nearly 200 countries pledge to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era and preferably a safer 1.5C. These temperature thresholds will be measured as an average over several decades, rather than a single year. This year has also seen the beginning of a warming El Nino weather phenomenon — which warms waters in the southern Pacific and stokes hotter weather beyond — although scientists expect the worst effects to be felt at the end of 2023 and into next year.

October was 1.7C warmer than an estimate of the October average for the pre-industrial era, Copernicus said. Global average temperatures since January have been the highest in records going back to 1940, the monitor

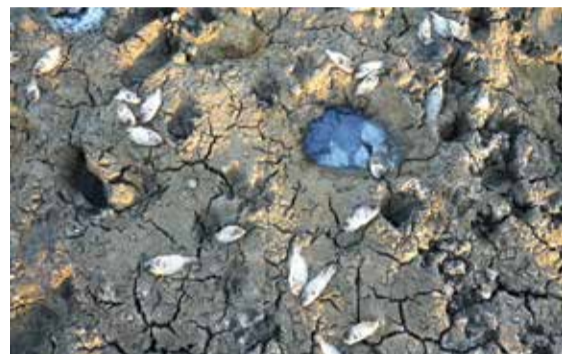
International

Scientists blame climate change for 'extreme drought' in Mideast

'With every degree of warming, Syria, Iraq and Iran will become even harsher places to live'

BAGHDAD: The "extreme" drought gripping Iraq, Syria and Iran would not have occurred without climate change caused primarily by burning fossil fuels, scientists said Wednesday, warning that punishing dry spells will become more intense as the world warms.

High temperatures due to human-caused climate change made the drought "much more likely to happen" — about 25 times more likely in Syria and Iraq and 16 times more likely in Iran, according to the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group. "Human-induced climate change has increased the intensity of such a drought such that it would not have been classified as a drought in a 1.2C cooler world," said the scientists.



CHIBAYISH: Dead fish lie on the cracking earth of a dry marsh in Chibayish in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province on July 5, 2023.

It found that existing vulnerability from "years of conflict and political instability" also reduced people's ability to respond to the drought, sparking a "humanitarian disaster". The research focused on the period from July 2020 to June 2023 in two regions where impacts have been most severe: Iran, and the basin of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the rivers that cross Syria and Iraq.

Both regions are currently experiencing an "extreme drought" as classified by the US Drought Monitor scale, said the scientists in a statement. "After quite good rains in 2020 and good harvests, three years of very low rainfalls followed with very high temperatures led to a

drought with very severe impacts on agricultural access to potable water," said co-author Friederike Otto, of the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London.

'Not so optimistic'

In an online briefing, co-author Mohammad Rahimi from Iran's Semnan University, called for better resource management. "Historically we didn't have a lot of rain so this is normal for our region, but the increase in temperature is a new topic," he said.

Rising temperatures in coming years threaten to evaporate much of the region's precipitation, according to Rahimi. "We anticipate that we will have more evaporation and transpiration from the plants so am not so optimistic for the future," he added. In Iraq, one of the world's leading oil producers, and in war-torn Syria, AFP journalists regularly observe the repercussions of climate change and the drought's impacts on the most vulnerable populations. Both countries have seen a drastic drop in agricultural production in recent years, particularly among wheat farmers. Reduced river flows and water pollution have left little catch for fishermen.

Water stress

By September 2022, the drought had displaced nearly two million people living in rural areas in Syria, according to the WWA. In Iran, water shortages have "led to tensions with neighboring countries" and soaring food prices, the statement said.

Conflicts over water are also on the rise in Iraq, where a recent UN report found one in five citizens in the country of 43 million people already suffered from water insecurity. High levels of water stress are exacerbated by a multitude of factors, including inefficient irrigation methods, outdated water treatment plants and rapid population growth. Key water systems are also increasingly sabotaged during conflicts. The scientists warned that "long-lasting severe droughts like these are no longer rare events". Instead, they can be expected to occur once every decade in Syria and Iraq, and twice every decade in Iran. "With every degree of warming, Syria, Iraq and Iran will become even harsher places to live," said Rahimi. — AFP



TAWAYHINAH: In this aerial picture, fishing boats are stranded on the banks of the Euphrates river in low water levels, near the village of Tawayhinah in Syria's northern Raqa governorate on July 12, 2023.— AFP photos

Somalia floods kill 29, displace 300,000 people

MOGADISHU: Flash flooding in southwestern Somalia has claimed the lives of more than two dozen people and displaced hundreds of thousands from their homes, an official said, as El Nino downpours lash East Africa. Since the beginning of the month, ferocious rainstorms have hit Somalia and its neighbors Kenya and Ethiopia, triggering landslides and submerging villages and farms.

The flooding comes after Somalia and parts of Ethiopia and Kenya suffered the region's worst drought in four decades. "We warned earlier about these rains and predicted this situation was coming," Mohamed Moalim Abdullahi, chairman of Somalia Disaster Management Agency, said late Tuesday.

At least 29 people have died and about 850,000

others have been affected, Abdullahi said, including over 300,000 who have been uprooted from their homes. The most affected regions were in the southwest of the strife-weary nation of 17 million people.

The UN humanitarian agency, OCHA, on Wednesday said rescue efforts were being delayed because roads had been cut. "Inaccessible roads and stuck vehicles are just some of the challenges aid workers in Somalia are grappling with," it said on X, formerly Twitter.

A joint effort by aid agencies is "racing against time" to rescue 2,400 people trapped by rising flood waters in the town of Luuq, on the road linking the Somalia-Ethiopia border with Baidoa, OCHA added. Somalia, as much as the Horn of Africa, is considered one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change but is particularly ill-equipped to cope with the crisis as it battles a deadly Islamist insurgency.

El Nino, which triggers higher global temperatures, is expected to last until at least April 2024, the United Nations said on Wednesday. The World Meteorological Organization highlighted that the phenomenon was occurring in the context of rapid climate change. — AFP

Saudi-hosted Sudan peace talks fall short of ceasefire

RIYADH: Sudan's warring parties have made no progress towards a ceasefire in their latest talks, instead reiterating past agreements to improve access to humanitarian aid, host Saudi Arabia said on Tuesday. "The facilitators regret that the parties were unable to agree on a ceasefire during this first round, as there is no acceptable military solution to this conflict," the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

Fighting erupted in April between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). More than 10,000 people have been killed in the war so far, according to a conservative estimate by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project.

Saudi Arabia hosted talks in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah during the war's first weeks which resulted in the Jeddah Declaration, a commitment to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure and to let in badly needed aid. But within a week United Nations aid chief Martin Griffiths told AFP there had been "important and egregious" violations of the agreement. Multiple early truces were violated as well.

The United States, which has helped facilitate the Jeddah talks, tried to downplay expectations for this latest round, with officials stressing it was too early to discuss a lasting political solution. However they did raise the possibility the talks would work on "achieving ceasefires", and Saudi Arabia voiced hope for "a political agreement under which security, stability and prosperity will be achieved for Sudan and its brotherly people".

The results have so far come up well short of that, and it was unclear on Tuesday what the next steps would be. The two sides agreed to work with the UN "to address obstacles to the delivery of relief aid" and identify contact points to facilitate the transit of aid workers, SPA reported. They also agreed to "confidence-building measures" including detaining prison escapees, it said, an apparent reference to top figures under former strongman Omar al-Bashir who broke out of detention facilities early on in the war and aligned with the army. "It is now up to both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces to fully adhere to their responsibility to implement what has been agreed upon," it said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week warned the RSF against what Washington called an "imminent large-scale attack" on North Darfur's capital, where thousands were seeking refuge from fighting. The RSF has in recent weeks claimed army bases in all but one of Darfur's major cities, raising fears it could take over the region. North of the Sudanese capital Khartoum on Tuesday, a massive fire ignited at an RSF-controlled oil refinery which the paramilitaries blamed on an army air strike, though the army said "a fuel tanker belonging to the militia exploded". — AFP



KYIV: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (left) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) give a joint press conference following their talks in Kyiv on Nov 4, 2023.

Ukraine gets EC nod to start EU membership talks

BRUSSELS: The EU's executive on Wednesday recommended opening formal membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova, in a major show of support for Kyiv as it battles Russia. Ukraine launched its bid to become part of the European Union right after Moscow's all-out invasion in February 2022, and was officially named a candidate to join in June of the same year.

"Today is a historic day," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said. "Ukraine continues to face tremendous hardship and tragedy provoked by Russia's war of aggression and yet the Ukrainians are deeply reforming their country."

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed the move as the "right step" for Europe. "Our country must be in the European Union. Ukrainians deserve it both for their defense of European values and for the fact that even in times of full-scale war, we keep our word," he posted online. Moldovan President Maia Sandu thanked Brussels and said her country was "firmly on the path for EU membership and we will continue working relentlessly towards this goal". The EU's 27 leaders still have to sign off on the recommendations at a summit in December.

Von der Leyen said Ukraine and Moldova should be required to complete further reforms before a formal start date could be set. She said her executive would issue an update on the progress in March 2024. Even if Ukraine starts talks, it will still only be at the beginning of a painstaking process of reforms that could last for years — if not decades — before it joins the EU.

Alongside urging progress for Ukraine and Moldova, Brussels also suggested member states grant Georgia candidate status. "I rejoice with the people of Georgia," Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili wrote online.

Balkan country Bosnia did not get the unalloyed seal of approval, failing to win clear backing for talks after becoming an EU candidate in December. The commission recommended opening negotiations "once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved". "We open the door very wide and we invite Bosnia," von der Leyen said. "Now to go through this door, for that, of course there has to be activity in Bosnia."

The countries bidding to join the EU join an already crowded field of hopefuls. Turkey began accession talks in 2005, but those are at a dead end. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are also stuck in negotiations. — AFP

An industry in transformation

Tommaso Di Giovanni, VP Market Activation & Support, Philip Morris International

The key to a successful business environment is continuous innovation. Believing that outdated business models and processes can be ignored is a recipe for future generations of disruptive companies to steal market share from established brands. For a cautionary tale, one only need look at the demise of the video rental market since the advent of online video streaming services.¹



Tommaso Di Giovanni

Of course, many industries go through major changes in their working practices and operations over time to improve the way they introduce and develop new products and services for society. As a result, consumers will start to demand better alternatives to traditional products and services. With greater access to education on social, environmental and health issues, among others, industries evolve; often leading to a switch from old products, like diesel cars and non-renewable energy, to better alternatives such as electric vehicles and sustainable power for their homes and businesses.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies had notably been moving away from their traditional business models and into new areas of growth and coinciding with advances related to Industry 4.0. This has allowed them to become more strategic and accountable for their actions. Fundamentally, the tobacco industry is no different from other industries in its own sense of welcome transformation. At PMI, our goal is to replace all cigarettes with smoke-free products as soon as possible.

As a 175-year-old institution, undoubtedly, it is as bold a move as any company can make to disrupt its business model and make a core product obsolete. While critics will point out that smoke-free products are more harmful than quitting smoking all together, a point PMI agrees with, smoke-free alternatives have the potential to significantly reduce the average levels of harmful chemicals compared to cigarettes, so represent a better choice for adults compared to continued smoking. This pragmatic approach is being increasingly welcomed not just by adult smokers but an increasing number of general public and health authorities around the world.

Backed by and recognizing the value of science and innovation, public health bodies in the UK and New Zealand actively integrate innovation, science and product related approaches into their strategies. For example, the former Public Health England, an executive agency of the UK's Department of Health, also ran month-long campaigns called "Stoptober", which encouraged those who do not quit completely to use potentially less harmful alternatives such as e-cigarettes.

While the industry is in transformation, ultimately innovations that are backed by scientifically

substantiated evidence need to be recognized, and adult smokers should be informed so that if they do not quit - which remains the best option for their health - they can choose better alternatives to cigarettes like smoke-free products. As of March 31, 2023, it is estimated there were nearly 25.8 million total IQOS users, PMI's leading smoke-free product. We further estimate that 18.5 million IQOS users - have switched to IQOS and stopped smoking, with the balance in various stages of conversion.²

However, one of the biggest barriers to achieving a smoke-free future is misinformation. This is especially true when it comes to scientific evidence that shows that smoke-free alternatives are a better alternative than continued smoking. Unfortunately, adult smokers are still left confused by false or misleading information that prevents them from making an informed choice, as the results of a new international survey by Povaddo suggests.

According to the survey, commissioned by PMI, there continues to be a high-level of confusion among adult audiences on this subject. 81 percent of adult participants of the survey in the UAE agree that adult smokers who would otherwise continue smoking cigarettes should have access to, and accurate information about smoke-free alternatives. This is supported by 90 percent of current adult smokers. Furthermore, 96 percent of those who in the UAE have switched to better alternatives and stopped smoking, confirmed that accurate information about how these products differ from cigarettes was an important factor in their decision to switch.

The key takeaway is that accurate information on smoke-free alternatives plays a decisive role in enabling smokers to move away from cigarettes. As a matter of public health, adult smokers also deserve accurate and current information to make their own informed choices.

We applaud the fact that the UAE was the first country in the GCC to regulate smoke-free products, such as heated tobacco products, electronic cigarettes, and devices to be used with them. These smoke-free products were subsequently regulated in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

These developments regarding smoke-free products in the GCC countries are encouraging. Our message remains very clear: quitting tobacco and nicotine is the best option for all smokers, and those who don't smoke or use nicotine products should not start. However, smoke-free products substantiated by robust scientific assessment, while not risk-free, present a much better choice for existing adult smokers than cigarettes.

As with many other industries going through fundamental change, the journey towards a smoke-free future is far from over. But the speed of change is increasing all the time. With wider societal support for smoke-free alternatives, the move away from cigarettes can be achieved faster and to the benefit of adult smokers and wider public health everywhere.

Sponsored by Philip Morris Management Services (Middle East) Limited

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-blockbuster-video-streaming-2020-1>

² Source: PMI Financials Q3 2022 Earnings Results: <https://www.pmi.com/investor-relations/overview/event-details?EventId=24686>

Business

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2023

Zain KSA net profit soars 234% to reach SAR 285 million in Q3 2023

Al-Kharafi: Sound financial strategies drive all-time high revenue of SAR 2.5bn

RIYADH: Zain's operation in Saudi Arabia (KSA) achieved its highest quarterly revenues, exceeding SAR 2.5 billion (\$673 million) in Q3 2023 ending 30 September, 2023, a notable 10 percent increase compared to the SAR 2.3 billion generated in Q3 2022. The operator also recorded SAR 285 million (\$76 million) in net profit, a massive increase of 234 percent compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

The company's strong financial performance also reflected the gains achieved by the tower infrastructure sale and leaseback deal that generated net gains totaling SAR 139 million (\$37 million) during the quarter, as part of the total financial impact that the company expects to reach SAR 1.1 billion (\$293 million) over the 18-month period of the tower ownership transfer.

Sustained business growth across all sectors has fuelled Zain KSA's robust Q3 profit growth, which is particularly evident in the enterprise sector with strong demand for cutting-edge services and solutions such as cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence. Beyond the growth in 5G revenue, Zain KSA has also witnessed a steady uptick in its consumer services and a surge in demand for Yaqoot digital ser-

Strong growth reported in B2B enterprise, 5G customers, and digital services revenue

vices and micro-finance solutions offered through Tamam, its fintech arm.

Commenting on the financial results, Zain Vice Chairman & Zain Group CEO and Zain KSA Vice-Chairman, Bader Al-Kharafi, said, "This all-time high revenue and impressive net profit growth accomplishment in Q3 2023 underscore the effectiveness of the Zain Group and Zain KSA teams' joint efforts in driving operational and financial strategies, which are firmly grounded in innovation and strategic investments. Management's focus remains on maximizing our impact across technology, economy, and society, particularly by enhancing our robust 5G services ecosystem within the community and enterprise sector."

Numerous milestones cemented the operation's position as a champion of digital transformation across the Kingdom. These include the launch of the world's first zero-emission 5G network in part-

nership with Red Sea Global and the commitment to localizing the business sector, strengthened through strategic collaborations, including a significant partnership with Pioneers Systems, a leading organization specializing in electronic circuit design and manufacturing. Zain KSA aims to localize cutting-edge IoT products and expertise.

The operation remains steadfast in its commitment to being genuine catalysts for Saudi Arabia's nationwide digital transformation, fully aligned with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to empower an ambitious nation, cultivate a thriving economy, and foster a vibrant society. Moreover, the operator will continue to meet the ever-growing demand for advanced services and solutions by seamlessly integrating innovation, sustainability, and investment, aspiring to deliver exceptional digital experiences across the telecommunications, fintech, digital entertainment, and cloud computing sectors.

Zain KSA has been recognized for its commitment to environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and corporate governance with an upgraded rating of 'A' in the MSCI ESG Index. This achievement underscores the company's unwavering dedication to integrating these principles into



Zain Vice Chairman & Zain Group CEO and Zain KSA Vice-Chairman Bader Al-Kharafi

its operational, financial, and administrative processes. Establishing clear performance indicators to track and measure progress, Zain KSA has instilled a culture of sustainability and responsibility across all levels of the organization.

UN: Fossil fuel plans by producing nations threatens 1.5C limit

PARIS: Plans to expand oil, gas and coal production by major fossil fuel countries would push the world far beyond the Paris deal's 1.5C global warming limit, the UN warned Wednesday.

The future of fossil fuels will be a key flashpoint when world leaders meet at the COP28 climate conference later this month, tasked with salvaging the world's agreed temperature thresholds.

Most of the world's leading producers of fossil fuels have pledged to achieve "net-zero" emissions by midcentury — a target that should align with the Paris Agreement's aims to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since the pre-industrial era, and preferably a safer 1.5C. But the annual United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Production Gap report makes it clear that the production plans of the top 20 producing countries — including the United States, China, Russia, Australia and COP28 host United Arab Emirates — are heading in the opposite direction.

Overall it found that governments' plans would produce 110 percent more fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5C, and 69 percent more than would be consistent with 2C. "Governments' plans to expand fossil fuel production are undermining the energy transition needed to achieve net-zero emissions, throwing humanity's future into question," said Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director.

"Starting at COP28, nations must unite behind a managed and equitable phase-out of coal, oil and gas — to ease the turbulence ahead and benefit every person on this planet." Burning fossil fuels is by far the main cause of climate change, accounting for most of the planet-heating carbon pollution driving global warming and the ensuing barrage of temperature records, devastating weather disasters and sea level rise. But countries have been reluctant to officially acknowledge this in global climate negotiations, and even the Paris Agreement does not explicitly talk about how to reach the targets it sets. That has led to a "large discrepancy" between governments' production plans and the need to rapidly move away from fossil fuels to meet global climate goals, said Ploy Achakulvisut, a lead author on the UNEP report and Stockholm Environment Institute scientist.

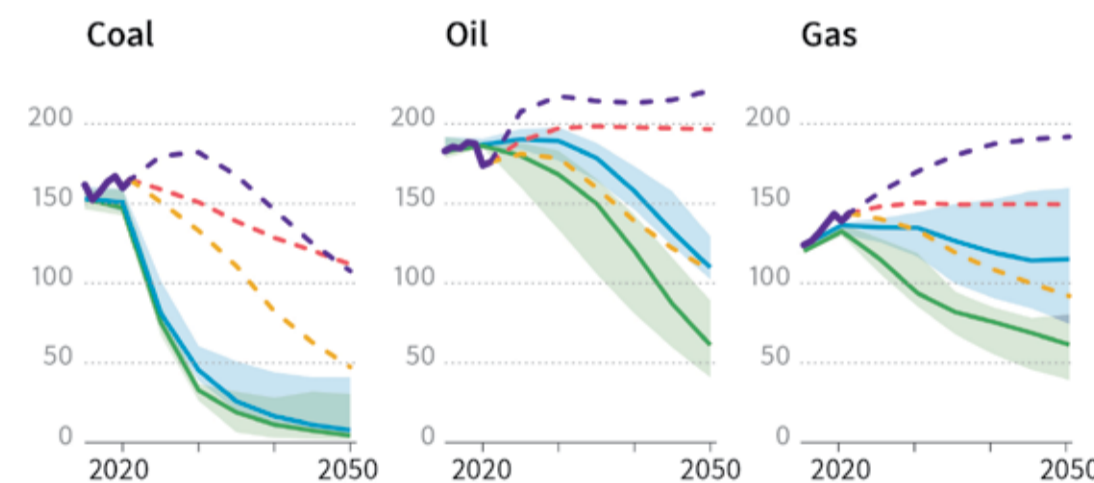
The UNEP report covers 20 countries that ac-

Fossil fuel production

--- Global estimate in Production Gap report - - - Trajectory modelled by IEA* from policies already put in place - - - Trajectory if all climate engagements are kept

Warming scenario — 2°C — 1.5°C

In exajoules per year



*International Energy Agency

Source: Production Gap Report 2023 from SEI, Climate Analytics, E3G, IISD and UNEP



count for 82 percent of production and 73 percent of consumption of the world's fossil fuel supply. It found that planned increases in production in these countries would produce 460 percent more coal, 82 percent more gas, and 29 percent more oil than would be in line with the 1.5C limit. The report said the United States — the top oil and gas producer globally — has encouraged accelerated domestic production of oil and gas since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even as it ramped up climate policies. US authorities forecast oil production will reach and remain at "record high levels" from 2024 to 2050, with gas production continuously increasing, the report said.

Meanwhile, UNEP said the world's biggest emitter China produces just over half of the world's supply of coal, the most polluting of the fossil fuels. Its domestic

coal production reached a record in 2022 of around 4.5 billion tons, the report said, adding that production was expected to peak this decade.

China, the world leader in renewable power, is committed to peaking emissions by 2030 and becoming carbon-neutral by 2060. Two years ago at the COP26 meeting in Glasgow countries agreed to "phase-down unabated coal power", the first time a fossil fuel had been explicitly mentioned in the negotiated agreement. Abated generally means to capture emission before they go into the atmosphere. UNEP hailed that pledge as a "significant milestone" but noted that since then production and use of fossil fuels have "reached record high levels". Fossil fuels and the emissions they cause are expected to dominate at the meeting in oil-rich UAE from November 30 to December 12. — AFP

US adds Vietnam to currency monitoring list

WASHINGTON: The United States said Tuesday it has added Vietnam to a "monitoring list" of foreign exchange policies, while removing Switzerland and South Korea from the group.

The US Treasury Department, in a semi-annual report to Congress, also called for greater transparency from China. The report looks at countries with large trade surpluses and which actively intervene in foreign exchange markets to gain trade advantages.

"Most foreign exchange intervention by US trading partners over the report period was in the form of selling dollars, actions that served to strengthen their currencies," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in a statement. She added that the global economic outlook faces "elevated uncertainty associated with Russia's war against Ukraine, geopolitical stresses in the Middle East, still-elevated core inflation, and the potential for stresses in China's property sector to deepen."

The Treasury's latest report includes six economies on its "monitoring list" of major trading partners, signaling they merit close attention to their currency practices and macroeconomic policies.

The list includes China, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

Switzerland and South Korea were removed from the list this time, having met only one of three criteria considered by the Treasury for two consecutive reports. The criteria considered are a large trade surplus with the United States, a significant current account surplus and evidence of "persistent, one-sided intervention" in foreign exchange markets. Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam were found to have triggered two criteria, the Treasury said Tuesday.

Meanwhile, China's "failure to publish foreign exchange (FX) intervention and broader lack of transparency around key features of its exchange rate mechanism continues to make it an outlier among major economies," said the Treasury. "It remains on the Monitoring List for this reason as well as due to its outsized trade imbalance with the United States," the report said. — AFP

Oil prices drop as demand concerns outweigh supply cuts

LONDON: Oil prices stayed lower in early Wednesday trading after dropping to their lowest levels since July. West Texas Intermediate was little changed at \$77.30 a barrel. Brent crude, the international benchmark, added 0.1 percent to \$81.69 a barrel. Both benchmarks posted falls of more than 4 percent a day prior, with the market worried about Asian demand. "The market is clearly less concerned about the potential for Middle Eastern supply disruptions and is instead focused on an easing in the balance," ING bank said in a note on Wednesday.

Supply is also rising, with Russian exports picking up, adding further pressure, ING added. "The weakness seen yesterday is likely to continue today" amid

growing crude inventories in the US, the bank noted. "Weaker economic expectations have weighed on crude prices recently, which has contributed to prices pulling off their highs and, arguably, once again justified the positions of OPEC+ nations in cutting supply," said Craig Erlam, a senior market analyst at Oanda.

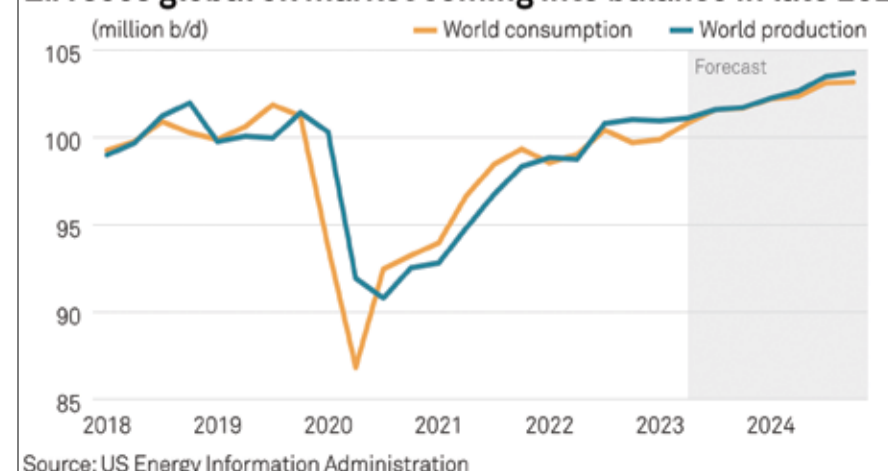
"It is not a question of whether the two countries keep to end-of-year targets, but whether they extend them." Saudi Arabia and Russia have announced that they would continue voluntary supply cuts of a combined 1.3 million barrels per day until the end of the year amid oil market volatility caused by the Zionist entity-Gaza war.

The supply cuts will probably be ex-

tended into the first quarter of 2024, given seasonally weaker demand, economic growth concerns and OPEC+'s goal to support the oil market's stability, said UBS strategist Giovanni Staunovo. "We expect the group to continue to closely monitor China's incoming data and the impact aggressive monetary policy tightening may have on economic activity in Europe and the US," he said.

The Swiss lender has forecast Brent moving back to the \$90 to \$100 a barrel range, supported by lower oil stocks. Brent is lower than where it was before October 7, when the Zionist entity-Gaza war broke out. Supply concerns remain despite China's crude imports rising by about 14 per cent in October from a year earlier amid higher domestic demand, according to the General Administration of Customs. However, overall exports from the world's second-largest economy shrank by 6.4

EIA sees global oil market coming into balance in late 2023



Source: US Energy Information Administration

per cent annually last month, the data showed. In the US, a less tight labor market and signs of weaker-than-expected services activity have boosted

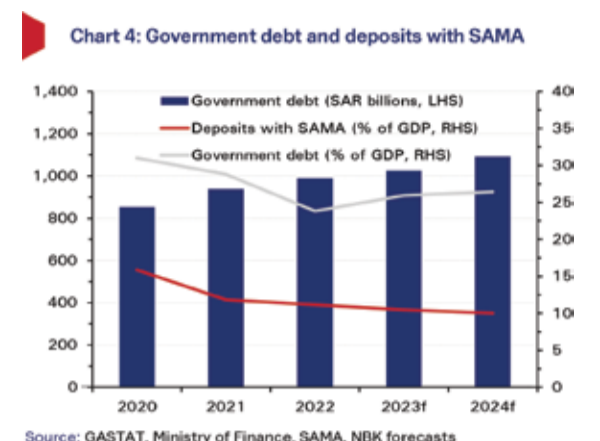
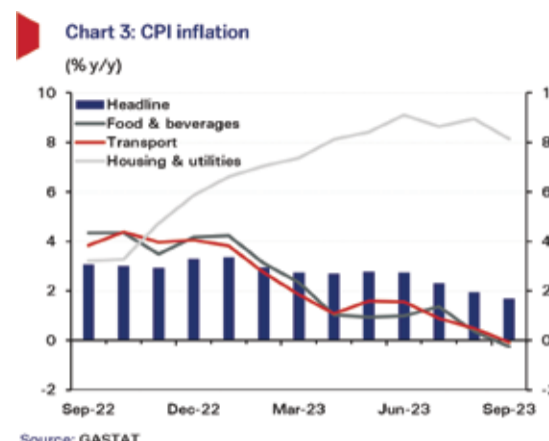
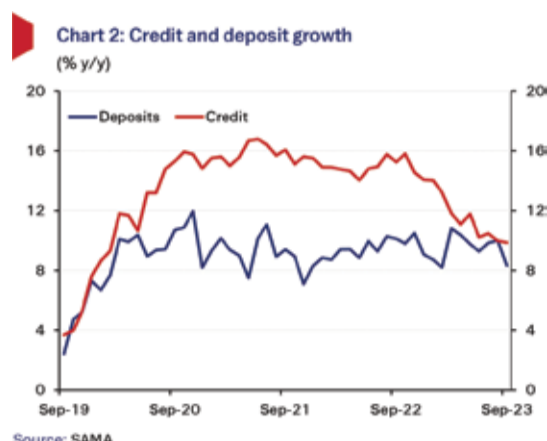
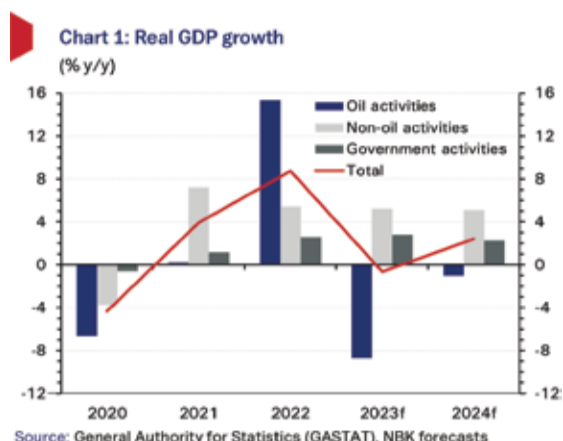
confidence that the US Federal Reserve has completed its interest rate-increase cycle, said David Kohl, chief economist at Julius Baer. — Agencies

Business

NBK ECONOMIC INSIGHT

Non-oil private sector to drive Saudi Arabia's growth in 2024

Inflation to soften, unemployment touching record lows



KUWAIT: Despite higher interest rates, non-oil economic growth remained solid, standing at 5.3 percent in H2023 following a 4.8 percent expansion in 2022. The private sector (+5.7 percent in H1) remained the main growth driver, although the government sector's expansion strengthened to 3.7 percent. Sector-wise, trade, restaurants, and hotels contributed the most to GDP growth, expanding by 8.7 percent in H1 supported by the strong focus on boosting tourism. In terms of expenditure on GDP, private investment continued to contribute the most to GDP growth, expanding by 8.5 percent in H1 while government investment was the fastest growing at 21 percent, both indicating a solid expansion in production capacity, which bodes well for future growth.

The favorable growth dynamics are expected to be sustained in the remainder of 2023 and 2024, despite elevated interest rates. Consumer spending remains strong with the value of POS transactions up around 10 percent y/y through October, though softening

from +18 percent in 2022. Despite tighter liquidity in the banking sector, credit growth, although moderating, remains in double digits at around 10 percent y/y through September driven by corporate credit (+12 percent) and, although softening, mortgage lending (+13 percent). PMI levels continue to indicate strong growth, averaging 57.2 in Q3, but lower than the multi-year high of 59.2 in Q2. Given all that, we forecast the non-oil sector's growth to finish 2023 at 4.7 percent, moderating to a still strong 4.5 percent in 2024 driven by north of 5 percent expansion in the private sector.

This constructive growth outlook is driven by the government's ongoing reforms as well as by an expansionary fiscal policy. The 2024 pre-budget statement has government spending in 2024 and 2025 13 percent higher than previously budgeted as the government switched to an expansionary fiscal policy, projecting fiscal deficits in these two years after previously forecasting surpluses. The role of the Public Investment Fund and the Nation-

al Development Fund in terms of enabling that growth is crucial with the former, for example, creating more than 560k direct and indirect jobs since 2016. Meanwhile, given a 5.25 percent increase in the US federal funds rate since March 2022, SAMA has hiked its policy rates by a similar 5 percent, and together with ongoing tight liquidity in the banking sector (given a faster growth in credit than in deposits) drove interbank rates to multi-decade highs of north of 6 percent. Nevertheless, the tightening cycle is close to being done with current market-implied expectations pointing to US rate cuts commencing in the second half of 2024, which will alleviate some pressure on Saudi interbank rates, and hence drop the cost of borrowing, which will be positive for credit expansion and non-oil growth.

As for the oil sector, growth was negative in H1 (-1.5 percent) given the production cuts, which have deepened since July, resulting in a projected 8.7 percent plunge in 2023. Given our house view on oil market dynamics, Saudi oil production is expected to increase from

current levels, but growth to remain slightly negative (-1 percent) for 2024. However, KSA will likely continue to take a very proactive and nimble role in affecting the global oil supply, which could result in a steep deviation with our oil production assumption for 2024. All in all, total GDP is forecast to drop by a limited 0.7 percent in 2023 pressured by the oil sector, then grow by 2.4 percent in 2024 driven by the non-oil sector.

Inflation eases

Inflation continued to soften, standing at 1.7 percent y/y through September with housing rentals (+9.8 percent y/y) nearly the sole driver of price pressures over the past year. Nevertheless, housing rentals are likely beyond their peak y/y increase, relieving pressure on the overall inflation rate going forward, which we project at an average of 2.3 percent this year and 2 percent in 2024. Solid non-oil growth and ongoing Saudization initiatives dropped the unemployment rate among Saudis to 8.3 percent in Q2, down from

9.7 percent one year before and nearly half the post-COVID high of 15.4 percent recorded in mid-2020.

Limited fiscal deficits

A 12 percent increase in spending in 9M2023 and a 24 percent drop in oil revenues resulted in an estimated 1.5 percent of GDP fiscal deficit as non-oil revenues expanded by a solid 2.2 percent. We project limited deficits of 2.1 percent and 1.7 percent of GDP in 2023-2024, despite the higher levels of government spending, mainly due to ongoing solid increases in non-oil revenues and higher dividends from Aramco, given the newly-adopted performance-linked dividends. Hence, debt levels should remain contained, below 27 percent of GDP by 2024. A main upside risk is higher-than-forecast oil production in 2024, leading to stronger GDP growth, while the major downside risk is a steeper-than-expected softening in non-oil growth driven by elevated interest rates and geopolitical tensions.

Paris business district looks to students to replace workers

PARIS: With companies cutting back on office space as working from home remains popular, Europe's biggest business district is looking to students to fill the void left by workers. Some 50 educational institutions have set up at La Defense, home to glass and metal high-rises and a huge modernist archway on the western outskirts of Paris.

COVID lockdowns emptied offices and with most companies still allowing employees to partially work from home, the number of staff toiling in offices has never fully recovered in business districts around the world. The work-from-home movement contributed to the financial troubles that led to this week's bankruptcy filing by US shared-office startup WeWork.

While occupancy rates have held up relatively well at La Defense, the area will have more office space to fill as a number of new buildings are under construction. The business district has hustled to woo small and medium-sized companies while also turning to schools to diversify its client base and live up an area that is home to banking, insurance and energy firms.

"Universities have been present at La Defense for a long time, but it has accelerated a lot in the last 10 to 15 years," said Pierre-Yves Guice, head of Paris La Defense, a public institution that manages the business district. For the past few months, the area has shown its "desire to complete its transformation into a place of student life and activity", Guice said. Some 70,000 students now consider La Defense their campus.

The latest arrivals are private schools from other French regions that specialize in management and business and want to plant their flags in the capital. "It's La Defense or nothing because that's where the companies are, being Europe's top business district is significant," said Florence Legros, head of ICN Business School.

The school, based in the eastern city of Nancy, opened its La Defense campus in 2018. Students see the same attraction. "My goal is to work in banks, so I didn't hesitate. I immediately chose La Defense," Matteo Buonanni, 24, an Italian student at the IESEG graduate business school.

"Paris is way more important for the resume," he said. IESEG's main campus is in France's northern city of Lille



LA DEFENSE, France: People sit on stairs on the Parvis de la Defense in Paris' business district of La Defense, outside Paris, at lunchtime on March 23, 2021. — AFP

but its logo features on a building next to a tower housing French banking giant Societe Generale. "We came here to be closer to the companies, and to be more visible in terms of recruitment of students and international partnerships," said Caroline Roussel, head of IESEG, which has been present at La Defense since 2008.

Omnes Education, which unites 15 higher education institutions, opened its La Defense campus in September 2022, also with the goal of bringing its students closer to companies.

"When the students are in classes they can see managers working through the opposite windows," said Christophe Boisseau, head of the ESCPE business school. He said there is a "mimicking effect" as students assimilate with the business culture.

Caroline Nachtwey at commercial realtor CBRE said being in the business district improves job prospects for students but is also advantageous for the schools as rents are slightly cheaper than in the centre of Paris. Office building owners have welcomed the influx of schools as finding new tenants has become more difficult since the pandemic.

Schools "are very serious players who make long-term contracts and pay on time", said Nachtwey.

But the district needs to adapt further. "There are things missing for it to be a real campus with a full range of experience and services for students that schools could legitimately want," Guice said.

The closest subsidized university cafeteria is located in a neighboring town. There are also few establishments in the area that cater to those on a student budget. Few stay in La Defense to have a drink after classes. "Sports facilities, eateries, places to relax and housing are the four issues that need to be addressed," said Guillaume de Rendinger, head of IESEG's La Defense campus.

The schools are trying to provide some of the facilities themselves. In addition to the state-of-the-art connected classrooms, Omnes Education's building in La Defense offers a cafeteria, a recreation area with arcade games and ping-pong tables, plenty of couches to unwind and outdoor terraces. Student housing is also sparse, but the area doesn't appeal to many students at the moment. "I wouldn't want to live in La Defense even if I could," said ESCPE student Chloe Gaillard.

"There isn't any life here," Carla Albiges, another ESCPE student, before hurrying back into the skyscraper for class. — AFP

Chemical giant Bayer to cut management jobs

FRANKFURT: German chemicals giant Bayer said Wednesday it would cut management jobs and was examining splitting off one of its divisions after reporting a massive third-quarter loss. The maker of Aspirin has long been under pressure from activist investors as its problems mounted, and earlier this year brought in a new CEO to help steer the company in a new direction. It reported a net loss nearly 4.6 billion euros (\$4.9 billion) from July to September, compared to a profit of nearly 550 million euros in the same period last year, dragged down by massive writedowns at its agrochemicals division.

This was linked to losses related to higher interest rates, and also reflects ongoing problems in the division due to falling sales and prices of its key glyphosate-based herbicides. "We're not happy with this year's performance," new chief executive Bill Anderson said in a statement.

The company said it plans "remove multiple layers of management and coordination" by the end of the year, which will include "a significant reduction in the workforce". Bayer did not say how many jobs might be affected. "95 percent of the decision-making in the organization will shift from managers to the people doing the work," said Anderson.

The diversified group—whose products include medicines, seeds and crop chemicals—said it was looking at splitting off either its consumer health or crop science division. Splitting the company into three businesses had been examined, but ruled out, it said. Further details will be disclosed in March, it said. Splitting the company into at least two parts—the agricultural and pharmaceutical businesses—to contain problems has been a key demand of investors.

Bayer has faced problems since its 2018 takeover of US firm Monsanto. The German conglomerate inherited Monsanto's legal woes around its Roundup glyphosate-based weedkiller, and has since faced a wave of lawsuits in the United States over claims it causes cancer. — AFP

US trade gap widens in September

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit expanded in September on the back of a larger rise in imports than exports, according to government data released Tuesday. The overall trade gap of the world's biggest economy broadened more than expected to \$61.5 billion, up from a revised \$58.7 billion in August, said the Commerce Department.

This came as imports picked up 2.7 percent to \$322.7 billion, while exports grew 2.2 percent to \$261.1 billion. US trade has been helped by consumer spending as households dipped into pandemic-era savings but higher interest rates, aimed at lowering inflation, have been expected to weaken demand. As growth slows in the United States' major trading partners following monetary policy tightening, exports could take a hit as well. The rise in September imports were boosted by consumer goods such as cell phones and household goods, as well as automotive vehicles and parts.

"While we expect exports and imports to weaken in the months ahead, imports will likely fare worse as



consumer spending slows and businesses work down their inventory levels," said economist Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics. "Meanwhile, a softening global backdrop and the strength of the US dollar will dampen export growth," he added.

The increase in the US September trade gap reflected a widening of the goods deficit, and a drop in the services surplus, said the Commerce Department in a statement.

The US goods deficit with China, a point of focus during the trade war between both countries, grew to \$24.1 billion in September, data showed. Trade posed "a small drag on GDP" in the third quarter, noted Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics. — AFP

US Fed official expects further rate hike needed

WASHINGTON: A senior US central bank official said Tuesday that she expects another interest rate hike would be needed to lower inflation further, even as officials held rates steady at their latest meeting.

The Federal Reserve's decision last Wednesday to hold interest rates at a 22-year high has fueled hopes that policymakers may be done lifting rates.

But Fed Governor Michelle Bowman said in prepared remarks in Ohio: "I continue to expect that we will need to increase the federal funds rate further to bring inflation down to our two percent target in a timely way." This comes amid "an unusually high level of uncertainty regarding the economy," with data revisions and geopolitical risks, said Bowman, who also sits on the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee.

While the United States has seen inflation come down from a peak last year, Bowman noted that recent readings "have been uneven." "I see a continued risk that core services inflation remains stubbornly persistent," she added, referring to a measure of inflation that strips out volatile components like food and energy. She also highlighted that although data such as job gains have been revised lower at times, average hourly earnings have been revised upwards.

All this complicates the task of predicting how the economy will change, she said. In announcing that the Fed would hold rates steady last Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell added that the process of lowering inflation "sustainably down to two percent has a long way to go."

He added that the Fed is not thinking about rate cuts for now. While financial conditions have tightened, in part through longer term bond yields, Bowman warned Tuesday that this can be volatile as conditions change. "I remain willing to support raising the federal funds rate at a future meeting," she said, if incoming data suggests that progress on inflation has stalled or is insufficient. — AFP

Business

Wage rises aid Europe's recovery but economies face risks: IMF

Bloc can reconcile long-term labor trends with less inflation

WASHINGTON: Europe's economic recovery is getting a much-needed boost from rising wages and higher incomes. But in countries where population aging is shrinking the workforce, policymakers may soon face new challenges. Short-term wage pressures could combine with longer-term tightness in labor markets to stoke inflationary pressures, the International Monetary Fund said in a report on Wednesday.

After two years of falling purchasing power, it's not surprising that Europe's workers are pushing for more pay. Nominal wages rose by 4.5 percent in the euro area and more than 10 percent in other parts of Europe in the first half of this year. Higher wages help alleviate cost-of-living pressures and support economic expansion. But improved productivity, coupled with tight macroeconomic policies which limit companies from passing on higher costs to consumers, are essential if economies are to afford much higher wages without fanning inflation, as discussed in IMF's latest Regional Economic Outlook.

Wage growth has differed across countries. Across much of Europe's advanced economies, wages have further

to rise before they catch up with prices, meaning that pressure for pay rises is likely to persist. In Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, wage growth has been more rapid and kept up with prices. This region has seen high wage growth in the past, but back then productivity growth was strong as well. Today it is weak. That means further high pay rises would chip away at competitiveness.

Wage pressures are unlikely to subside any time soon. As the Chart of the Week shows, longer-term trends are already squeezing labor supply (total hours worked). Demographics and shorter working weeks mean employers face fierce competition to find qualified workers and must pay more to retain them. Over the past decade, Europe's labor force participation grew relatively rapidly. Even if this trend continues, the labor supply could decline by 0.1 percent annually over the next five years as the population ages, population growth slows, and the shortening of working weeks continues. By contrast, the US labor supply is expected to grow by 0.2 percent as immigration and longer working hours more than compensate for a deterioration in demographics.

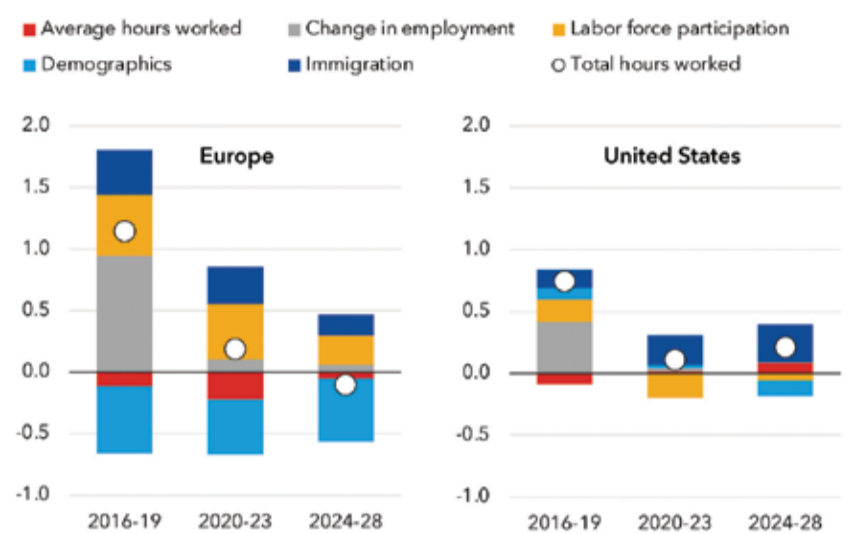
The scope to offset these labor market trends in Europe is limited. Proposals to increase retirement ages further may run into political opposition. There is also little scope to increase average working hours because shorter work weeks are gaining popularity.

What must policymakers do? There is a fine line between aiding economic recovery and banishing stubbornly high inflation. Central banks must watch for upside risks to inflation and closely monitor wage settlements and their consistency with productivity trends. A marked divergence would be worrisome. The mix of monetary and fiscal policy should remain appropriately tight to bring inflation back to target. At the same time, structural reforms to increase productivity are becoming critical. Doing so would both lower inflationary labor-market pressures and raise longer-term economic growth potential. Boosting the labor supply by allowing workers to work more hours, making it simpler to transition between jobs, equipping new generations for future jobs, reskilling workers, and facilitating the integration of migrant workers all have an important role to play.

Labor supply squeeze

Europe's total hours worked are expected to decline because of changing demographics and shorter work weeks.

Drivers and overall change in total hours worked (annualized growth, percent, weighted average)



Sources: Eurostat, European Commission, Federal Reserve Economic Data, World Economic Outlook database, US Congressional Budget Office, IMF staff calculations. Note: Demographics captures working age population and domestic population growth.

IMF

M&S shares soar on profit jump, dividend return

LONDON: Shares in Marks & Spencer rallied more than 10 percent Wednesday after the British clothing-to-food retailer posted surging half-year net profits and a first dividend since before COVID. Profit after tax surged by a quarter to £208 million (\$255 million) in the 26 weeks to the end of September year-on-year, M&S said in a statement.

Revenue jumped almost 11 percent to £6.1 billion amid intense competition, as UK retailers battle for consumers' cash amid a cost-of-living crisis sparked by elevated inflation.

News of the first shareholder payout in four years, at one pence per share, pushed M&S stock up 10.1 percent to 247.90 pence in late morning deals on London's top-tier FTSE 100 index, which was flat overall. "Our strategy to reshape M&S for growth has delivered strong results in the first half," said chief executive Stuart Machin.

"We have maintained our relentless focus on trusted value, giving our customers exceptional quality product at the best possible price." M&S anticipated "good" trading in the upcoming peak-demand Christmas and New Year period, noting customers were "already responding positively" to festive products. However, the retail giant warned over the "uncertain" economic backdrop, noting the impacts of high interest rates, potential deflation, geopolitical events and erratic weather conditions.

The group is still implementing a cost-cutting overhaul that was partly prompted by sector-wide fallout from the COVID pandemic. M&S said its cost reduction drive was "on track" and delivered more than £100 million in savings in the first half, which should climb to £150 million over the year.

"M&S continues its transformation at speed," said Richard Hunter, head of markets at online trading firm Interactive Investor. "The amount of the dividend is nominal, but nonetheless is a statement of management confidence and reflects the improving health of the entire business." — AFP

Airbnb upgrades platform to shake off a tough year

SAN FRANCISCO: Airbnb chief Brian Chesky believes the home-sharing platform is "turning a corner" after a difficult year that included a crackdown in New York.

The company that shook up the hotel industry by enabling travelers to book stays in local residences unveiled its latest updates on Wednesday. "After this release, we will be turning a corner, picking our heads up and focusing on new products and new offerings," Airbnb chief executive Brian Chesky said in an interview with AFP.

The confident outlook came after a year marked by cities seeking to clamp down on Airbnb-type short-term rentals out of fears they were taking long-term housing off the market and driving up rents.

Chesky said in September that he did not see a swift end to the strict limits recently imposed by New York. A local law severely limiting apartment or room rentals of less than 30 days went into effect that month and triggered a plunge in short-term rentals on Airbnb in one of its largest markets.

"We're always willing to work with the city of New York, just like we are willing to work with cities all over the world," Chesky told AFP.

"At this point, we are focused on trying to support the hosts in New York." While the city was most of Airbnb's market more than a decade ago, it represents less than 1.5 percent of the firm's business today. Chesky pushed back against the idea Airbnb was driving up housing costs, confident that rents and hotel prices in the city will continue to climb even with the law in place.

Airbnb is seeing travelers to New York shift to booking lodging with hosts in the neighboring state of New Jersey or resorting to seeking places to stay offered discretely in online classified ads, according to Chesky. He believes an overall lack of housing is the culprit, not Airbnb.

Airbnb also has strained relations in France, its second-largest market, with authorities looking to rein in tourist rentals. For now, the huge housing needs for the 2024 Olympics in Paris have interests in the city aligned with those of Airbnb. "This is a real opportunity for our service to shine in Paris," said Chesky, who expects a half million people to



A hand-drawn sign hangs on the door of a home available for short-term rentals through Airbnb in Los Angeles, California.

stay at Airbnb lodgings during the games. On paper, the San Francisco-based company has seen its profits swell every quarter this year.

Airbnb reported an adjusted profit of \$1.6 billion on \$3.4 billion in revenue in the recently ended quarter, topping earnings posted in the same period a year earlier. Airbnb shares lost ground nonetheless, with investors evidently disappointed with forecasts for earnings in the current quarter.

The latest updates to the platform are aimed at helping hosts better showcase homes and giving potential visitors a reliable sense of what to expect. Airbnb has launched more than 350 updates and tools in the past two years, and concentrated its efforts on its core home-share business after the travel industry was hammered during the pandemic, according to Chesky.

"Every step of the way, we've been trying to address feedback," Chesky said. A new "Guest Favorites" category is a collection of the 2 million "most loved" homes on Airbnb based on ratings and other

data collected over some half a billion trips, according to the company. "One of the reasons people still like hotels is because they know what they are going to get," Chesky said.

Airbnb set out to make a feature that "combined the uniqueness of Airbnb" when it comes to the variety of homes with the reliability guests expect from hotels, the chief executive said of the platform upgrades. As the array of homes on Airbnb grows, the platform faces complaints from hosts who wind up making less money due to the competition.

"We tried to thread the needle and find the midpoint where hosts feel like they are getting great economics and guests feel like they are getting great value," Chesky said.

"We're making a huge amount of progress and I'm really proud of where we are." He contended that while Airbnb prices have not risen in the past year, hotel costs have, and that hosts are making record-high earnings in countries around the world. — AFP

European stocks drift as traders weigh earnings

LONDON: Asian and European stocks struggled Wednesday as investors digested a barrage of company results and assessed the US Federal Reserve's interest rate plans, while oil plumed more multi-month lows on energy demand worries.

London stocks edged higher, aided partly by a ten-percent surge in retail stalwart M&S after it announced bumper profits and a return to the first shareholder dividend in four years.

Paris also rose with lender Credit Agricole jumping two percent after logging a solid third-quarter performance, but Frankfurt flattered with Commerzbank falling 2.5 percent despite lifting its annual guidance and posting rising quarterly profit. "European markets are hovering around the flatline as investors digest a slew of earnings reports," said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at trading firm Interactive Investor.

Oil prices sank to levels last seen in July on heightened demand fears arising from the weak global economy. Crude had already plunged about four percent the previous day on news that China's exports fell at a faster pace than predicted in October. That stoked fresh concern over its appetite for energy. "Oil prices tumbled head over heels," noted analyst Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "This sharp decline was primarily driven by concerns about the outlook of global demand due to weak data points from China and other economies."

Asian stock markets meanwhile wobbled Wednesday with US monetary policy in focus after the US central bank hinted last week at no more tightening. However, Fed officials refuse to com-



LONDON: Asian and European stocks struggled Wednesday as investors digested a barrage of company results and assessed the US Federal Reserve's interest rate plans.

mit one way or the other for now, instead saying they want to see more evidence that inflation is on a true downward slope and the labor market has softened enough.

Data on Friday that showed jobs creation was slowing—but not too much to cause worry about the economy—instilled confidence the Fed was on course to deliver a soft landing for the economy and avoid a recession. Chicago Fed boss Austan Goolsbee gave little away Tuesday, saying he was laser-focused on getting control of prices.

"We've got to get inflation down—that's the number-one thing," he told CNBC. "I'm absolutely hammering that's what we should be watching." He added that it was looking possible to do that without hurting the economy. — AFP

Taiwan hopes UK deal will help bid to join wider trade bloc

TAIPEI: Taiwan signed a trade partnership agreement with Britain on Wednesday, a move it hopes will help boost its bid to join a major Asia-Pacific trade bloc despite China's objection. Taipei applied in 2021 to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which has been seen as a bulwark against Chinese dominance in the region.

Its bid was opposed by Beijing, which claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory and has submitted its own application to join. Britain signed a formal agreement to join the CPTPP in July, which is expected to come into force next year, and Taiwan's government has been lobbying members of the bloc for support. Taipei said the new Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) Arrangement would boost its long-term trade partnership with Britain and help

promote its inclusion in the bloc. "The UK will become a new member of the CPTPP, and improving economic and trade relations with the UK is of great significance to our efforts seeking membership," Taiwan's top trade negotiator John Deng said in a statement. He said the deal would boost Taiwan's international trade status and "the confidence of other countries in the world to interact with us".

Discussions would begin soon on digital trade, investment, renewable energy and net-zero carbon emissions, the statement said. Taiwan's foreign ministry said in a statement the deal would help "strengthen global economic security and supply chain resilience, and maintain a free and open international trade order". Britain, like most countries, diplomatically recognizes China over Taiwan but maintains unofficial ties with the island. Beijing lashes out at any diplomatic action that might lend Taiwan legitimacy and opposes Taipei joining international organizations, including the World Health Organization. — AFP

Lifestyle

EX-FILM DIRECTOR WINS FRANCE'S TOP LITERARY PRIZE



Laureate of the Prix Goncourt literary prize, French author Jean-Baptiste Andrea poses with his book during the award ceremony at Drouant restaurant, in Paris.



French writer and director Jean-Baptiste Andrea poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP photos



Laureate of the Prix Goncourt literary prize, French author Jean-Baptiste Andrea waves as he poses during the award ceremony at Drouant restaurant, in Paris.

France's top literary prize, the Goncourt, was awarded Tuesday to former film director Jean-Baptiste Andrea for his novel "Veiller sur elle" ("Watch Over Her") set in Italy's dark fascist years. Andrea, 52, has made an impact in the English-speaking world with two well-received translations, "A Hundred Million Years and a Day" and "Devils and Saints". His latest 600 page epic focuses on a sculptor and his romance with a woman from a much wealthier background.

Andrea has forged an unusual path, starting off as a screen writer and film director in a career in cinema saw him make a handful of movies including the 2006 black comedy "Big Nothing" starring the famed "Friends" actor David Schwimmer. He turned to novels relatively late in his 40s, with his first book published in 2017. "Watch Over Her" is his fourth novel. "I wanted to write something bigger than what I had written before, to leave behind all the limits that I had initially imposed on myself in 20 years of cinema... but which I had also paradoxically imposed on my first three novels," he told France Inter radio in late October.

"It's a homage to Italy, the country of my ancestors," he added. In a century-old tradition, the Goncourt winner is revealed at lunchtime at the Drouant restaurant in central Paris. As well as prestige, the award guarantees a boost in sales — on average over the past 20 years, to around 400,000 copies. Andrea beat off the favorite Eric Reinhardt's stylistically bold novel about a woman's decline after leaving her family.

Reinhardt's "Sarah, Susanne et l'ecrivain" ("Sarah, Susanne and the Writer") tells the story of a woman driven to despair by an awful husband. In a sign of the tightness of the race, the jury awarded the prize only on the 14th round of voting. "It's a very emotional moment, I have

been drying my tears in the taxi," Andrea said as he arrived at the restaurant.

Competing prizes

There are four finalists each year for the prize. Also in contention was Gaspard Koenig, who had previously focused on philosophical essays, and won many fans with "Humus", the story of two

Sinno won the Prix Femina on Monday for her story of incest and sexual violence, "Triste tigre" (Sad Tiger) - effectively ruling her out of the Goncourt by the unwritten rules of the rivalry. Immediately after the Goncourt, and also at the Drouant restaurant, is the awarding of the Renaudot, a much more unpredictable prize. Initially started as a

punk band and regular on the underground Parisian night scene. She started writing at the age of 29, notably writing the novels "Asphyxia" and then "Superstars". The Renaudot prize has not been without controversy over the years, with many accusing its jurors of handing the award to their friends in the chummy literary world of Paris.



French writer Jean-Baptiste Andrea speaks to press after being awarded the Goncourt Prize for his novel "Veiller sur elle".

young agricultural activists opposed to intensive farming. But one of the contenders, Neige Sinno, had no chance of winning thanks to a long-running rivalry with another award, the Prix Femina, which was created one year after the Goncourt in 1904 to challenge the open sexism of its founders, Jules and Edmond de Goncourt.

joke in the 1920s by journalists killing time while waiting for the Goncourt jury, the Renaudot is now considered one of France's top awards.

That award went to cult novelist Ann Scott for her novel "Les insolents" about a woman in her forties who leaves Paris to reinvent her life. In an eclectic career, Scott was a model, a drummer in

That included giving its 2013 essay prize to Gabriel Matzneff, who spent decades writing about his preference for sex with children and faced a rape investigation after the publication of a book "Consent" that has now been made into a movie. — AFP

Green 'Marianne' brings climate crisis to French letterboxes

The union representing striking actors said Monday it could not agree to studios' "last, best and final offer" issued over the weekend in a bid to end a months-long stalemate that has crippled Hollywood. Negotiators for the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) have been mulling the proposal since Saturday, as studios seek to halt a damaging stoppage that has brought TV and movie production to a standstill for four months. In a statement to members posted on social media on Monday the committee said they were determined to bring the 116-day strike to an end "responsibly," but had not yet found common ground with the body representing Disney, Netflix, Warner, Universal, Paramount and Sony.

"There are several essential items on which we still do not have an agreement, including (Artificial Intelligence)" the statement said. "We will

keep you informed as events unfold." Pressure has been rapidly mounting for a deal. Unemployed actors have increasingly been struggling to make ends meet, and studios already face gaping holes in their release schedules for next year and beyond.

Talks to reach a deal in recent days were attended by studio CEOs, underlining the urgency to end the crisis. SAG-AFTRA represents some 160,000 performers. Actors below Hollywood's upper echelons say it has become almost impossible to earn a decent living, as long-standing pay structures have failed to keep pace with inflation and industry changes.

In particular, the growth of streaming platforms — who typically order fewer episodes per series, and pay minimal "residuals" when a hit show gets rewatched — has severely eroded their incomes. But the use of Artificial

Intelligence — particularly the notion that an actor's likeness could be used long after they have filmed a role — has been a sticking point.

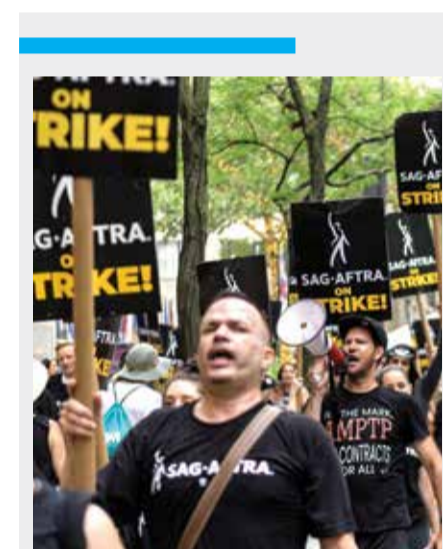
Studios, who have already delayed the release of major films such as "Dune: Part Two" and the next "Mission: Impossible" installment, are eager to restart productions on hit shows like "Stranger Things" in time for next year. Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos told AFP negotiations were still going on. "We're at the table and we're working really hard to get it done," he said. "I feel like we're really close. But you know, these are complicated deals and we're navigating tricky waters. Our goal is we want to get folks back to work."

\$6.5 billion cost

When SAG-AFTRA walked out in mid-July, Hollywood writers were also on strike. It was the first time that the

two unions had headed to the picket lines simultaneously since 1960, when actor (and future US president) Ronald Reagan led the protests. But writers struck a deal with studios in September. High-level talks between studios and the actors' union began soon after. The overall cost of the industry-wide Hollywood standstill is now estimated to be at least \$6.5 billion, mainly from lost wages.

Last week, SAG-AFTRA chief negotiator Duncan Crabtree-Ireland told members he was "cautiously optimistic" after both sides compromised on minimum pay demands, and a bonus structure for starring in hit shows or films. In previous rounds of talks, studios offered to create strict protections requiring consent and compensation for AI, but the actors' union argued these did not go far enough. — AFP



In this file photo SAG-AFTRA members and supporters walk the picket line as members of the Screen Actors Guild strike in New York. — AFP

Actors' union says no agreement on studios' 'final' offer

A green version of national symbol Marianne will adorn French envelopes from this month, after President Emmanuel Macron unveiled a new standard postage stamp highlighting environmental themes. The "Marianne of the future" represents the feminine symbol — whose image can be seen in public buildings such as town halls across France, or as a monumental statue on Paris' Place de la Republique — in profile, with her hair merging into a verdant background.

Graphic designer Olivier Balez said he wanted to "share in the narrative about the climate emergency, without falling into stoking anxiety". "It's a Marianne of the green transition, with her long neck along the diagonal symbolizing momentum towards the future," he told AFP.

Macron was present at the French postal service's printing works in the Dordogne region of southwest France to unveil the new stamp. But he also hailed the post office's "transformation" in the face of "immense challenges with all the changes in habits in our time". The publicly-owned postal service made 70 percent of its revenue from letters just 15 years ago, a figure that has collapsed to just 16 percent today, chief executive Philippe Wahl said.

Around 400 staff at France's postal print works in Boulazac, 110 kilometers (70 miles) east of Bordeaux, still turn out almost a billion stamps a year. Many are manufactured for other countries such as Japan. By tradition, each five-year French presidential term sees the head of state pick a new standard stamp. The new one will be available from November 13. — AFP



French illustrator Olivier Balez poses with the new face of Marianne, the national personification of the French Republic, which will be depicted on French La Poste stamps at the national stamp printing house Philaposte during an unveiling ceremony in Boulazac.



An employee checks the new face of Marianne, the national personification of the French Republic, printed on the new French La Poste stamps.



This photograph taken at the national stamp printing house Philaposte in Boulazac, southwestern France on November 7, 2023, shows the new face of Marianne, the national personification of the French Republic, printed on the new French La Poste stamps during an unveiling ceremony. - AFP photos



France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Philaposte chairman Paul Dworkin (center) is presented by French illustrator Olivier Balez (right) the new face of Marianne, the national personification of the French Republic, which will be depicted on French La Poste stamps at the national stamp printing house Philaposte.



France's President Emmanuel Macron (center), flanked by Philaposte chairman Paul Dworkin (right), shakes hands with an employee.

Lifestyle



This photograph shows Thai influencer Dalintan 'MoRich' Promphinit posing with his viral post in elephant print pants on his smartphone in Bangkok.



This photo shows a shop selling clothing in elephant print at Icon Siam shopping mall in Bangkok.



This photo shows workers cutting elephant print fabric into clothing patterns at Chinrada Garment Co in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai.



This photo shows Bangkok Tales clothing brand co-founder and designer Gigi Wo showing her clothing items made with elephant print at Icon Siam shopping mall in Bangkok.



This photo shows a worker inspecting clothing with elephant print at Chinrada Garment Co in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai.



This photo shows a Thai couple wearing elephant print clothing near Thapae Gate in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai.



This photo shows elephant pants for sale in Chatuchak Weekend Market in Bangkok.

Thai TikTokers make 'elephant pants'... cool?

An elegant Thai socialite poses in sunglasses, a designer handbag discreetly visible in the Instagram photo, her stylish outfit completed by a pair of... elephant print pants? Infamous across Southeast Asia, so-called elephant pants made of thin baggy cotton were once synonymous with grubby backpackers in search of themselves — and the nearest Chang beer, a popular local lager. The pachyderm pants were adopted by foreigners during an early wave of budget Southeast Asia travel, as visitors sought to appropriate “authentic” culture, despite there being little truly Thai about them, researchers say.

While they are still sold from stalls alongside Bangkok’s tourist haven Khaosan Road for about 150 baht (\$4), young Thai influencers and the kingdom’s high society are increasingly reclaiming them. “The pants are dope,” influencer Dalintan “MoRich” Promphinit told AFP, after cavorting in a bright yellow set for his two million TikTok followers in April. “They’re not just souvenirs foreign tourists buy,” he said. “Thais are rocking them too.” “It’s like a fashion statement,” with a “teen street fashion vibe”, said the 19-year-old. His fans instantly loved his latest look. “They kept asking where I got it,” he said.

'A sensation'

Posing at Chiang Mai’s ancient wall, Toei, 27, who only gave her first name, is clad head-to-toe in the “adorable” elephant print. “Initially, they were a hit

among tourists, but now they’re trending on TikTok, thanks to influencers,” her 28-year-old friend Ong, also sporting the print, added. “So, we embraced the trend.” A half-hour drive away is Kingkarn “Jack” Samon’s factory, where rolls and rolls of pachyderm-inspired prints are measured, sliced and stitched.

“The pants have become a sensation in Thailand,” she told AFP during a tour of the facility, which has around 100 workers, producing 1,000-2,000 items daily. Orders — including shirts, dresses, even handbags — are up 30 percent since the end of the COVID pandemic. The pants account for 85 percent of sales. Hers is

just a small cog in the kingdom’s textile and garment industry, which accounts for about three percent of its GDP.

Kingkarn imports the fabric from China, shipping it to Bangkok for printing, before it returns to her factory, 700 kilometers (430 miles) away. The design’s popularity, however, has not been without controversy. An online debate brought local reporters to her door after some Cambodians claimed Thailand had appropriated the elephant print, Kingkarn explained. Refusing to be drawn on the latest iteration of the historic rivalry, she did admit with a grin: the debate has boosted sales.

'Think Versace'

Ultimately, little about the pants are Thai, said Kanjana Thepboriruk, an associate professor at Northern Illinois University’s Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Their adoption by foreigners, attempting to stake a claim on “authentic experiences”, instead meant Thais viewed them as international, she said. “I see the elephant pants as the latest way that young rich Thais or aspiring middle-class Thais align their identity with Westerners,” she told AFP. And high-end retailers have quickly cottoned on.

Inside a luxury Bangkok mall, Bangkok Tales’ elephant pants sell for 1,090 baht (\$30). “When people think about elephant pants, (they think of them as) really cheap, but I want to make them look like Versace,” explained founder and designer Rawiwan “Gigi” Worasin-siri. Rawiwan initially targeted tourists, but the pandemic flipped her business model, with Thais filling the deficit. “I was surprised,” she said, crediting TikTok for her success. At the other end of the spectrum in Bangkok’s sprawling Chatuchak market, 32-year-old Onnitsa Kuren already owns three pairs. “Elephant-patterned pants go with anything — just pair them with a T-shirt,” she said. Musing as she browsed, she added, “I’m currently on the lookout for a red pair.” — AFP

Confiscated French love letters finally opened after 265 years

Undelivered letters written to French sailors during an 18th century war between Britain and France have finally been opened and studied — after more than 250 years gathering dust. The unread letters have provided a rare insight into the lives of sailors and their families in the 1700s, from the wife of a senior naval officer to an elderly mother chastising her son for not writing. The Royal Navy seized the messages during the Seven Years’ War, a global conflict that ended in 1763 that saw Britain and France lead rival alliances.

“I could spend the night writing to you... I am your forever faithful wife,” wrote Marie Dubosc to her husband Louis Chamberlain, the first lieutenant of a French warship in 1758. “Good night, my dear friend. It is midnight. I think it is time for me to rest.” Unknown to Marie, her husband’s ship, the Galatee, had been captured by the British, researchers at the University of Cambridge found. Louis never received the letter and his wife died the following year, almost certainly before he was released by the British.

In another missive dated January 27, 1758, the mother of young sailor Nicolas Quesnel from Normandy takes him to task about his lack of communication.

“I think more about you than you about me... In any case I wish you a happy new year filled with blessings of the Lord,” 61-year-old Marguerite wrote in a letter probably dictated to someone else. “I think I am for the tomb, I have been ill for three weeks. Give my compliments to Varin (a shipmate), it is only his wife who gives me your news,” she added. The Galatee was captured by the British en route from Bordeaux to Quebec in 1758.

'Universal human experiences'

British Admiralty officials at the time deemed the letters of no military signif-

icance and the vast majority languished in the archives, unopened, until they attracted the attention of Cambridge history professor Renaud Morieux. “I only ordered the box out of curiosity,” said Morieux, whose findings were published on Tuesday in the journal “Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales”.

Presented with three piles of very small letters held together by ribbon, Morieux said he “realized I was the first person to read these very personal messages since they were written”. “Their intended recipients didn’t get that chance. It was very emotional,” he said.

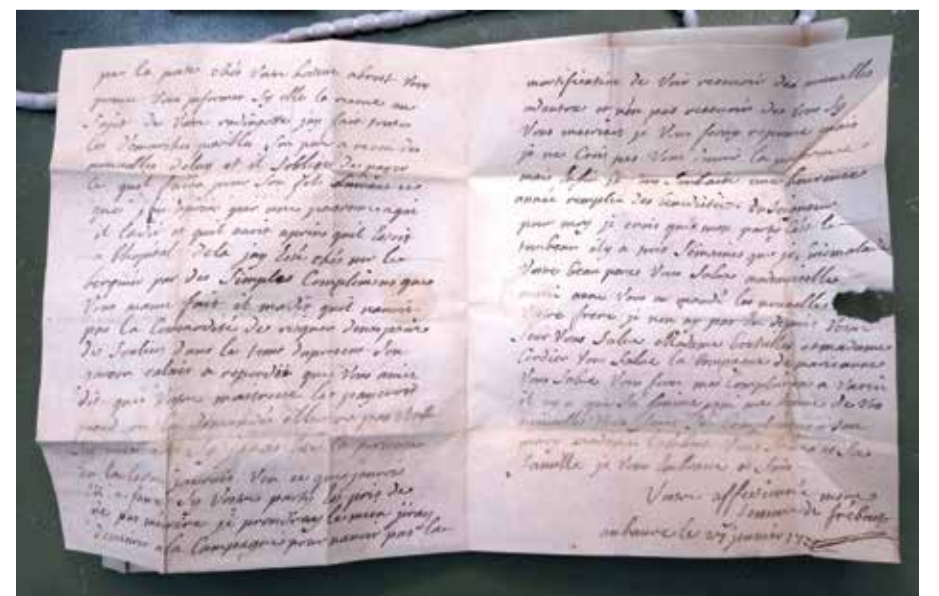
Morieux identified every member of the Galatee’s 181-strong crew, with letters addressed to a quarter of them, and also carried out genealogical research into the men and their correspondents. In 1758 alone a third of France’s sailors were captured by the British. Over the whole period of the Seven Years’ War nearly 65,000 were imprisoned by the British. Some died from disease and malnutrition although others were released. Letters would have been the only means their families had of trying to contact them, said Morieux.

“These letters are about universal

human experiences, they’re not unique to France or the 18th century,” he added. “They reveal how we all cope with major life challenges. “When we are separated from loved ones by events beyond our control like the pandemic or wars, we have to work out how to stay in touch, how to reassure, care for people and keep the passion alive,” said the historian. “Today we have Zoom and WhatsApp. In the 18th century, people only had letters but what they wrote about feels very familiar.” — AFP



An undated handout photograph taken by The National Archives and released by the University of Cambridge shows a love letter from Anne Le Cerf, aka Nanette, to her husband Jean Topsent. - AFP photos



An undated handout photograph shows a letter from Marguerite Quesnel to her son Nicolas Quesnel dated from January 27, 1758.

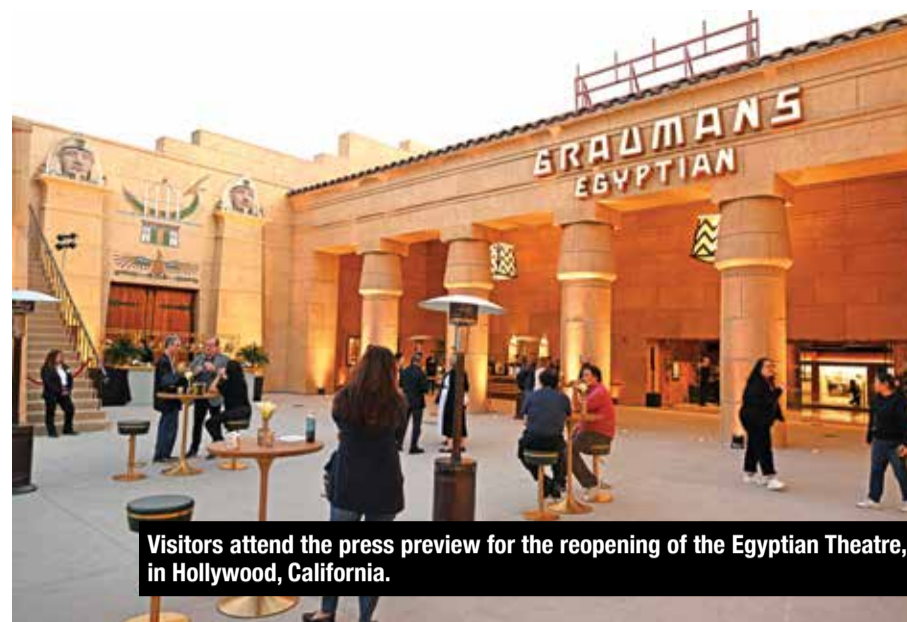
Lifestyle



Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos attends the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre, in Hollywood, California.



A decorative details is pictured at the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre.



Visitors attend the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre, in Hollywood, California.

NETFLIX REOPENS HOLLYWOOD'S 'EGYPTIAN' MOVIE PALACE

The Egyptian Theatre, which hosted Hollywood's first-ever red carpet premiere in its faux hieroglyph-adorned courtyard more than a century ago, reopens this week under the new ownership of Netflix. Steeped in silver screen lore, the venerable Los Angeles movie palace may seem an unlikely investment for a streaming giant that has made a fortune convincing viewers to watch films on their TVs, laptops and even phones. But for Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, the chance to produce the "Zelda" film.



The interior of the theatre is pictured during the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre.



Popcorn is served at the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre.

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rapid ascent from tech disruptor to a key player at the very heart of the entertainment industry—was a no-brainer. "Hollywood is all about symbols," he told AFP. "The Hollywood Sign and this theater are probably the two most iconic symbols of Hollywood... this one, unfortunately, was falling down." The theater first opened its doors in October 1922, with the world premiere of Douglas Fairbanks' "Robin Hood." Previously, Los Angeles' burgeoning entertainment industry had been focused on the downtown area, a few miles away.

Organizers installed dazzling lights to lure a crowd, and rolled a red carpet across the theater's courtyard for VIP guests including Charlie Chaplin. That innovation, intended to emulate the etiquette of European royalty, would set the model for showbiz premieres for a century to come. Over the following decades, the Egyptian Theatre fell on harder times, and it suffered major damage in Los Angeles' 1994 earthquake. It was taken over by the nonprofit American Cinematheque, which repaired the building, but had difficulties funding its upkeep—until Netflix came along.

The deep-pocketed streamer agreed to bankroll work to renovate the theater once again. It has not disclosed the cost, but estimates put it around \$70 million. "We, as an aptly named nonprofit, were struggling," said Rick Nicita, chairman of the American Cinematheque. "They came in and just formed a terrific partnership with us. They understood what we were trying to do."

Under the deal, Netflix will host its own screenings during the week, starting with David Fincher's "The Killer" this Thursday, while the American Cinematheque will showcase classics such as "Lawrence of Arabia" at the weekends. "We rent movie theaters all the time, in New York and LA, to do our



This handout picture courtesy of Netflix taken on October 18, 1922 shows the first premiere and opening night of the the Egyptian Theatre playing "Robin Hood", in Hollywood, California. --AFP photos

premieres and our events," said Sarandos. "So the idea that we can put that effort into something that results in the preservation of something great? It just felt like a win-win."

'Next 100 years'

With its sand-colored walls and columns, colorful hieroglyphs and a giant, metallic scarab beetle hanging above the stage, the theater was originally designed to cash in on the 1920s mania for all things Ancient Egyptian. Ushers at the original "Robin Hood" premiere were dressed in Egyptian costumes. In a stroke of marketing fate, Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered just two weeks later.

While undergoing the theater's latest restoration, Netflix redesigned the

building and courtyard to closely mirror its 1922 specifications, albeit with state-of-the-art audio and visual installations. The move is the latest statement of intent from a company that has invested heavily in recent years to lure the silver screen's top directors and stars to its films, and consolidate its position as a company at the center of the Hollywood ecosystem, with respect for its traditions.

The streamer also took over New York's historic Paris Theater a few years ago. "We've been making original movies for under seven years... we haven't contributed much to the whole overall 100 years [of Hollywood history]," said Sarandos. "But this is like a down-payment on the next 100 years."

Of course, the prospect of Netflix dominating the film industry for a century ahead is likely to trouble some theater owners. While rivals such as Apple have recently put movies like "Killers of the Flower Moon" on big screens for extended runs before streaming, Netflix has irked movie theater bosses by refusing to do the same. But Sarandos rejects "all this talk about whether or not streaming has been good or bad for the entertainment industry," pointing to the reopening of the Egyptian. "In so many ways, streaming has saved the entertainment industry. And this is a symbol of that, too."—AFP



Nintendo announces new live-action 'Zelda' movie

Nintendo is developing a film based on its hugely popular "The Legend of Zelda" franchise, the Japanese gaming giant announced, as it bids to capitalize on the blockbuster success of its recent "Mario" movie. The new, live-action "Zelda" movie will be directed by Wes Ball, who made the "Maze Runner" trilogy, and co-produced by Avi Arad, who has overseen several major "Spider-Man" films. Legendary Nintendo designer Shigeru Miyamoto, who created both the Mario and Zelda game franchises, and was heavily involved in this year's smash-hit "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," also returns to produce the "Zelda" film.

"I have been working on the live-action film of The Legend of Zelda for many years now with Avi Arad-san, who has produced many mega hit films," Miyamoto wrote on an official Nintendo social media account Tuesday. "I have asked Avi-san to produce this film with me, and we have now officially started the development of the film with Nintendo itself heavily involved in the production."

"It will take time until its completion, but I hope you look forward to seeing it." Japanese-owned Hollywood giant Sony Pictures will co-finance and distribute the movie in theaters. Nintendo remained wary of Hollywood adaptations of its fran-

chises for decades after its 1993 live-action "Super Mario Bros." movie disastrously flopped.

But its return to the big screen with "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" was an enormous box office success, grossing \$1.36 billion globally—second this year only to "Barbie." The success is part of a growing Hollywood trend. Other recent successful video game adaptations have included HBO's TV series "The Last of Us," and horror movie "Five Nights at Freddy's," which has topped the US box office for the past two weeks.

In an interview with AFP in April ahead of the "Mario" film, Miyamoto said Nintendo had learned that "we wanted to develop the movie ourselves, instead of licensing it" to another company. No plot or casting details for the "Zelda" film have yet been announced. In the game series, elf-like warrior Link typically battles with the evil king Ganon to save Princess Zelda from dark forces plaguing the magical, Medieval-style land of Hyrule.

The Zelda game franchise, which began in 1986, includes more than a dozen titles—several of which have been acclaimed by critics as among the great video games of all time—and has sold over 150 million copies. —AFP

Bleu Royal diamond rakes in nearly \$44 million at Geneva auction

An exceptionally rare blue diamond went under the hammer in Geneva Tuesday, selling for more than \$40 million, making it one of the most expensive diamonds ever sold at auction, Christie's said. Weighing 17.61 carats, the Bleu Royal is the largest internally flawless fancy vivid blue gem ever to appear for sale in auction history. It is the star lot in a series of luxury sales in Geneva this month, which also feature items from movie history including pearls worn by Audrey Hepburn and Marlon Brando's self-engraved watch. The Bleu Royal had been expected to fetch between \$35 million and \$50 million in Christie's Magnificent Jewels auction. After an intense seven-minute bidding round between three potential buyers, it was snapped up by an anonymous private collector for 39.505 million Swiss francs (\$43.8 million), including tax and fees.

"We are extremely pleased," Max Fawcett, Christie's head of jewelry in Geneva, told AFP shortly after the final hammer came down. The gem, he pointed out, had sold for nearly \$2.5 million per carat, making it "the most expensive jewelry lot sold in all of 2023" by any auction house worldwide. And historically, "it is in the top-10 most expensive lots ever sold in terms of jewelry," he said. The pear-shaped diamond, set on a ring, has been in a private collection for decades, and Tuesday's sale marked the first time it went to auction.

'Top of its class'

Before Tuesday's sale, Christie's international head of jewelry Rahul Kadakia highlighted the gem's extraordinary color. He pointed out to AFP that many modern colored diamonds had a modified cut to enhance the color. In the Bleu Royal's case, "the rough material itself was so rich that they were able to cut it into a classic brilliant faceting style," he said.

"It checks all the boxes—really top of its class," he added. Fancy vivid blue

diamonds weighing more than 10 carats are exceptionally rare. Since Christie's was founded in 1766, only three such stones have appeared for sale—all in the last 13 years. One of them was the Oppenheimer Blue, which fetched \$57.5 million at a 2016 auction, and is the only diamond Christie's has ever sold for more than Tuesday's Bleu Royal.

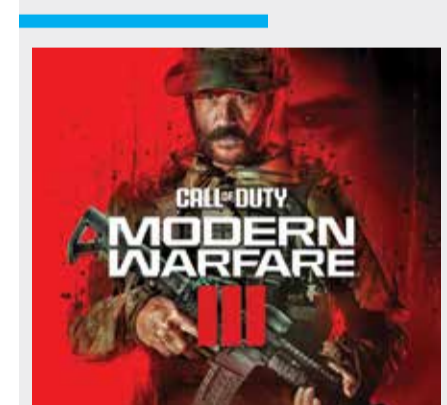
Competing auction house Sotheby's meanwhile sold the De Beers Cullinan Blue last year, for just over \$57 million. A separate online jewels sale, which runs until November 16, features the pearl necklace worn by Hepburn in the 1953 film "Roman Holiday".



This photograph taken in Geneva, shows "Bleu Royal", a rare 17.61 carats internally flawless fancy vivid blue pear shaped diamond. — AFP

Hepburn, who played a princess in the romantic comedy, picked it out from a selection offered by the Austro-Hungarian jeweler Furst, and returned it afterwards with a signed photograph. It is being sold by a European collector and has a starting price of 18,000 Swiss francs (\$20,000).

In Christie's separate Passion for Time watches sale on Monday, the timepiece worn by Brando in the 1979 Vietnam War movie "Apocalypse Now" meanwhile went under the hammer for just over \$5 million. —AFP



'Call of Duty', the stalwart video game veteran, turns 20

James Spratt recalls dashing home from school as a teenager to band together online with friends to do battle in "Call of Duty", the global video game juggernaut that never gets old. The franchise deployed by Activision Blizzard 20 years ago helped define the military shooter game genre, winning millions of fans and raking more than \$30 billion. And Spratt, to the amazement of his dad, now makes a living sharing his "CoD" sniper skills on his YouTube channel from his home in Britain.

"At school, we were racing home basically to get a squad of six together because if you missed out on being with your friends, you were playing by yourself," said Spratt, who recently turned 30 years old. "There was something about that game that just kept me coming back every year; I was hooked." Activision published the original "Call of Duty" created by Infinity Ward studio in October of 2003 and has released installments at an annual cadence that continues with the arrival of "Modern Warfare 3" on November 10. The yearly release cycle is "almost this ingrained holiday" and became a "secret sauce" for the franchise, "Call of Duty" general manager Johanna Faries told AFP. —AFP

Sports

Australia's Maxwell in 'full body pain' during 'greatest-ever' ODI innings

Third double hundred in World Cup history and first in a run chase

MUMBAI: Glenn Maxwell said his entire body was in pain and that he almost retired during an epic match-winning double century for Australia at the 50-overs World Cup, hailed Wednesday as the greatest one-day knock of all time. The mercurial Australian smacked a remarkable 201 not out as his team successfully chased 292 for victory over Afghanistan in Mumbai on Tuesday.

It was only the third double hundred in World Cup history and the first in a run chase. But it came at a price, with Maxwell riddled by severe cramps. He collapsed in agony at one stage, barely able to walk as he limped between the wickets. Maxwell admitted discussing with Australian physio Nick Jones whether he should retire after his body gave up and he sank to the ground while on 147 and with 55 runs still needed to win.

But with a place in the World Cup semi-finals at stake and Maxwell leading the recovery after Australia had slumped to 91-7, he defied the discomfort. "It was a strange one, because I was cramping in one of my toes, which was sort of going up the front of my shin. And then as I set off to try and get down the other end, I cramped in that calf as well," he told Australian media.

"So I was cramping both sides of my lower leg. And as I went 'Oh no, I'm cramping,' I cramped in my left hamstring at the same time. So I was like, 'I've got both legs.' And then I had a back spasm when I hit the ground. "So I was just like full body just in pain."

Czechs rout champions Swiss in BJK Cup opener

SEVILLE: The Czech Republic earned an impressive 3-0 victory over defending champions Switzerland in their Billie Jean King Cup finals opener on Tuesday. Marie Bouzkova and Linda Noskova triumphed in singles matches to give the Czechs an unassailable lead before the doubles rubber in Group A, dubbed 'the group of death', including record 18-time winners the United States.

Noskova defeated Celine Naef 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-4 in a long battle of two 18-year-old debutants, before Bouzkova saw off the in-form Viktorija Golubic 6-4, 6-4. Then Czech doubles pairing Barbora Krejckova and Katerina Siniakova beat Golubic and Jil Teichmann 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 to cement their perfect start.

Swiss player Naef fought her way back in as Noskova nearly gave up a 4-1 lead in the first set and then crumbled under the pressure in the second to

Eddie Jones interested in Japan job but says no offer yet: Reports

TOKYO: Eddie Jones would "definitely be interested" in coaching Japan but has yet to receive an offer, Japanese media quoted the former England and Australia boss as saying. The 63-year-old Australian has been strongly linked with a return to the team he led from 2012 to 2015, one week after he quit as Wallabies head coach following a disastrous spell in charge. Speaking to reporters in Yokohama on Tuesday, Jones said he had not held any formal discussions with the Japan Rugby Football Union but would welcome an approach. "I've had no offer, let's be clear," said Jones, according to Kyodo News and other prominent local media.

"If they came to me and said, are you interested in coaching them, I'd definitely be interested." Jones' wife is Japanese and lives in the country. His mother is Japanese-American. Jones is reportedly the front-runner on a JRFU list of candidates that also includes South African Frans Ludeke, who coached Kubota Spears to last season's Japanese club title.

Ludeke is set to be interviewed this month for the job, which previous coach Jamie Joseph left after Japan's first-round World Cup exit. Australian media reported that Jones had held an online interview with the JRFU while coaching the Wallabies at the World Cup, something which he has strenuously denied.

Jones told reporters in Yokohama that Japanese rugby had "always been my passion". "Japan can't stay where they are because if they stay where they are, they'll actually start to slide," he said. "So they've got to make a big push now." Jones led Japan to a historic win over South Africa at the 2015 World Cup in England, in a match that became known as the "Miracle of Brighton". His success with Japan helped land him the job as coach of England, who he took to the 2019 World Cup final and eventual defeat by South Africa.

Jones was fired by England last December having won just five of 13 Tests in 2022. He was hired by Australia in January but quit last week after two wins from nine Tests, including a worst-ever World Cup performance where the Wallabies failed to make it out of the pool phase. Jones said he was denied the chance to reform Australian rugby and he said Japan also needs to make major changes. "You're going to have to be courageous and you're going to have to do things differently," he said. — AFP



Eddie Jones

'Loves playing for Australia'

Jones suggested he should retire, but Maxwell was having none of it after being told the chances of being able to return after treatment, if needed, were not good. "We talked about coming off, trying to get some work into my back and trying to loosen up my legs a little bit," said the 35-year-old, who missed Australia's previous match due to a concussion after falling off a golf cart. "Jonesy, the physio, said it would be really hard for me to come back down the stairs after that. "We just came up with 'let's stay at the same end' for as long as you can until you feel like you can walk to the other end or if there's an easy single here and there." Maxwell went on to compile the highest-ever ODI score by an Australian in a 202-run eighth-wicket stand with captain Pat Cummins, who contributed just 12 in the partnership.

Cummins called it the "greatest ODI innings that has ever happened", sealing Australia's spot in the last four. "We were just chatting about it, all the players, and we've decided it's one of those days where you just go, 'I was there in the stadium the day Glenn Maxwell chased down that total by himself,'" Cummins told cricket.com.au. "He was cramping, but I think you saw out there how much he loves playing for Australia." The sentiment was shared by some of the world's cricketing greats, who were also left stunned. "From Max pressure to Max performance! This has been the best ODI knock I've seen in my life," Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar said on X, formerly Twitter. — AFP

force a deciding third. However this time it was Naef who collapsed from 4-1 up, with world number 41 Noskova converting her second match point.

"I came back in the third, which is the most important one," said an exhausted Noskova, after the two-hour, 31-minute match. The 11-time champions clinched the tie when Bouzkova saw off Golubic, stepping up at key moments — she saved five of seven break points and converted four out of five herself.

"I'm super happy to get the second point and the win for our team," said Bouzkova. "(The travelling fans) are so loud, it gives us so much support ... I enjoy the team spirit and I'm really happy with this win." Switzerland were without Belinda Bencic, world number 17, who announced last week she is pregnant and expecting her first child.

Earlier Slovenia beat seven-time winners Australia 2-1, taking both the singles rubbers, but they were pipped in the doubles. Kaja Juvan and Tamara Zidansek succeeded against last year's runners-up to get Slovenia off to a winning start on their finals debut.

Juvan defeated Ajla Tomljanovic 6-4, 6-1 before Zidansek beat Daria Saville 6-1, 6-4. Kimberly



MUMBAI: Australia's Glenn Maxwell (R) falls on the ground after a muscle cramp during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between Australia and Afghanistan at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

Birrell and Storm Hunter, the latter only arriving a few hours before the match after travelling from the WTA Finals in Cancun, Mexico, beat Veronika Erjavec and Ela Milic in a first-to-ten super tie-break, 7-5, 6-7 (2/7), 10-5.

Juvan got the ball rolling with a comfortable straight-sets win over Tomljanovic, serving strongly against her tiring Australian opponent, who has endured an injury-hit season, playing just five matches prior. The Slovenian has a strong record at the Billie Jean King Cup, recording her 10th victory in 11 matches across singles and doubles.

"I feel really good playing here and I was thinking today, I can't seem to lose at this (competition)," said Juvan. Zidansek produced seven aces against Saville as Slovenia moved top of Group B, which also features a solid Kazakhstan team, including 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina.

Hunter, who will finish the season as the world number one in doubles, and Birrell's doubles victory gave Australia a lifeline. "It's been a busy 24 hours," Hunter told reporters. "It was obviously a quick turnaround, but for me, representing my country is the greatest honor and honestly the most amazing thing I can ever do with my tennis career." — AFP

New Zealand way of WCup dreams being washed away

BENGALURU: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson insisted Wednesday his team will "focus on cricket" when they face a potentially make-or-break clash with Sri Lanka, shrugging off fears that rain may return to wash away their World Cup dreams.

Williamson's team lost a rain-hit match at the same Bengaluru venue last weekend against Pakistan despite posting a mammoth 401. Pakistan won by 21 runs via the DLS method after scoring 200-1 in 25.3 overs, edging ahead on the required run rate when the game was halted due to the weather. The defeat was a fourth successive loss for the Kiwis who had won their opening four games. New Zealand, runners-up in the last two editions of the World Cup, are fourth in the table and need a win on Thursday to push their bid to secure a semi-final spot.

A washout could open the door for either Pakistan or Afghanistan to leapfrog them and grab the remaining last-four place. "There's lots of things that we can't control and the weather is one of those," Williamson told reporters on the eve of the game against 1996 champions Sri Lanka.

"You mentioned that there might be some of it, there may be a thought in the back of your mind, but at the end of the day, our focus will be on the cricket that we want to play and trying to put all our focus and energy into that." Afghanistan and Pakistan have the same number of points as New Zealand while India, South Africa and Australia have already sealed semi-final places. Williamson returned in the previous match after recovering from a broken thumb to make a valiant 95 in a 180-run stand with Rachin Ravindra, who hit 108. Lockie Ferguson, who has claimed eight wickets in five matches, missed the previous two games with an Achilles injury has now recovered to be available for selection.

Williamson said Ferguson "balances out our attack nicely" but did not reveal the team for the all-important match. Fast bowler Matt Henry was ruled out of the rest of the tournament last week with a torn hamstring and Kyle Jamieson has taken his place in the squad.

Ravindra has stood out with 523 runs including three centuries to boost his team's run-making ability despite recent losses. Ravindra, a Wellington-born Kiwi of Indian-origin, played a key role in the team's opening four victories and Williamson lauded the run-machine for his "amazing talent".

"We sort of knew the talent was there, but to come out and repeat and be one of the players of the tournament so far, not only with the bat, but he's also making really valuable contributions with the ball," said Williamson. "Very special player and great that he's on our side." — AFP



BENGALURU: New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson (L) stretches during a training session at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on November 8, 2023, ahead of their 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match against Sri Lanka. — AFP



BURIRAM: Prima Pramac's Spanish rider Jorge Martin (C) celebrates as he crosses the finish line ahead of Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's South African rider Brad Binder (R) and Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia (L) during the MotoGP Thailand Grand Prix at the Buriram International Circuit in Buriram. — AFP

Pressure cranks up as MotoGP title duel goes to Malaysia

SEPANG: Francesco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin will take their MotoGP title duel to the Malaysian grand prix at Sepang on Sunday, with the championship too close to call with three races left. Italy's Bagnaia tops the standings on 389 points, just ahead of Martin on 376, with the Spaniard having closed the gap last time out with a thrilling victory in Thailand.

Marco Bezzecchi is mathematically still alive in the world championship fight in third, on 310 points, but realistically it is a straight shootout between the top two. A maximum of 111 points are up for grabs over the next three weekends, including the sprint races. Ducati's Bagnaia is the reigning title-holder but Martin — who is chasing his first world crown — has gradually reeled in his rival over the second half of the 20-event season. The Pramac rider ramped up the pressure by winning his seventh sprint race of the campaign in Thailand and followed that up by sealing a nail-biting fourth grand prix victory of 2023.

The 25-year-old Martin admitted to sleepless nights as a roller-coaster season goes to the wire. "I can admit that I already feel the pressure," he told reporters after his triumph at Buriram. "I have not slept. I need four or five days of not thinking about motor-cycles. "I am mentally destroyed." The 26-year-old

Bagnaia also cut an emotional figure in Thailand and was especially disappointed to finish seventh in the sprint race. The Italian crossed the line third, behind Brad Binder, in the grand prix but was awarded second after the South African was penalized one place for exceeding track limits on the final lap.

"I'm just a bit angry I lost too many points in the sprint race and I think we need to improve a bit," said Bagnaia, who won in Malaysia last year after Martin crashed out. The Italian's experience of winning the world title last year could be an advantage as they approach the business end of the campaign.

"In terms of pressure, last year was higher," he told motogp.com. "It was more intense and I felt more the weight on my shoulders. "This year is different. I feel a lot of pressure — the same — but in a more motivational way." Like in Thailand a fortnight ago, the steamy weather will again be a factor in Malaysia. Temperatures all week are forecast to push 33 degrees Celsius (91 Fahrenheit) coupled with punishing humidity and an ever-present threat of tropical thunderstorms. The Sepang International Circuit, near Kuala Lumpur, used to host Formula One and provides plenty of opportunities for high-speed racing and overtaking. It is a wide track with two long straights and one of the longest laps in MotoGP.

The action starts on Friday with practice, followed by more practice, qualifying and a 10-lap sprint race on Saturday. The 20-lap grand prix is on Sunday. No matter what happens in Malaysia, the title fight will remain alive going into the penultimate race in Qatar followed by the season-ender in Valencia at the end of November. — AFP

Sports

Man City, Leipzig into Champions League last 16 as Shakhtar stun Barcelona

Atletico Madrid top Group E after crushing 10-man Celtic 6-0

PARIS: Holders Manchester City and RB Leipzig became the first teams to reach the last 16 of this season's Champions League on Tuesday while Danylo Sikan's goal allowed Shakhtar Donetsk to claim a stunning win over Barcelona.

Pep Guardiola's reigning champions have eased into the knockout phase with a perfect record, a 3-0 win over Young Boys making it four wins out of four in Group G. Erling Haaland followed his brace in Bern two weeks ago with another two goals against the Swiss side, with the Norwegian striker opening the scoring from the penalty spot midway through the first half.

Phil Foden got their second in first-half stoppage time and Haaland struck again soon after the interval for his 15th goal of the campaign. Young Boys were then reduced to 10 men as Sandro Lauper was sent off, and City saw out a 10th successive home victory in the competition.

"People say 'yeah, the group stage, it is easy', but you have to do it. In life, you have to do it when people expect you to do it," Guardiola told TNT Sports. Leipzig joined City in securing progress from Group G thanks to their 2-1 victory at Red Star Belgrade.

Xavi Simons gave the German side an early lead with a lovely finish into the far corner, and Lois Openda made it 2-0 in the rain in Belgrade with his 10th goal this season. Former European Cup winners Red Star pulled one back through a Benjamin Henrichs own goal but they are now left to fight it out with Young Boys for a place in the Europa League knockout phase.

Barcelona could have booked their last-16 ticket with a win over Shakhtar but instead the Ukrainian club kept their own hopes alive with a famous 1-0 victory in Hamburg. Sikan, the 22-year-old forward, headed in the only goal of the Group H game late in the first half and Shakhtar held on.

"It feels very sweet," smiled coach Marino Pusic, whose Shakhtar team are playing European home games this season in Germany amid the ongoing war in Ukraine. "I am tremendously proud of my players and all the people in the club, working very hard to support me in this, what we achieved tonight."

Pepe becomes oldest-ever scorer

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez admitted his team were "in a bit of a footbaling rut", and they were joined at the top of the section on nine points by Porto, who beat Royal Antwerp 2-0 in Portugal. Brazilian forward Evanilson opened the scoring with a first-half penalty and Antwerp had Jurgen Ekelenkamp sent off early in the second half.

Porto wrapped up the win in stoppage time when veteran defender Pepe headed in to become, at the age of 40 years and 254 days old, the oldest player ever to score a Champions League goal. The record had previously been held by Francesco Totti, who last scored in the competition for Roma aged 38.

PSG, Newcastle beaten

Paris Saint-Germain and Newcastle United's hopes of qualifying from Group F remain in the balance after both lost on the road. PSG went down 2-1 away to AC Milan despite Milan Skriniar giving the French side an early lead at San Siro. It took Milan just three minutes to draw level when Rafael Leao finished in acrobatic fashion, and Olivier Giroud headed in the winner five minutes after half-time. Borussia Dortmund are top of the group after beating Newcastle 2-0 in Germany, with Niclas Füllkrug and Julian Brandt scoring the goals, one in each half.

"When you concede four goals in this stadium three days ago, it feels good to hold a very good English team to nil—and the two goals will do us good," Brandt told Amazon Prime as Dortmund bounced



MANCHESTER: Young Boys' Senegalese midfielder #20 Cheikh Niassé (L) closes in on Manchester City's Belgian midfielder #11 Jeremy Doku during the UEFA Champions League Group B second leg football match between Manchester City and Young Boys at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

back from Saturday's 4-0 thrashing by Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga.

Atletico hit six

Atletico Madrid top Group E after crushing 10-man Celtic 6-0 in Spain to record their biggest win in the modern Champions League. Antoine Griezmann grabbed an early opener and Celtic then had Daizen

Maeda sent off midway through the first half. Alvaro Morata made it 2-0 in first-half stoppage time and Griezmann made it three on the hour mark.

Samuel Lino got the fourth with a stunning strike, Morata lashed in the fifth for his second, and Saul Niguez completed the scoring. Lazio beat Feyenoord 1-0 in the same section thanks to Ciro Immobile's 200th goal for the club. — AFP

Talisca lifts Al Nassr with Ronaldo away

DOHA: Brazilian striker Anderson Talisca shone for Al Nassr in Cristiano Ronaldo's absence in the Asian Champions League on Tuesday, striking a hat-trick in their 3-2 victory against Al Duhail in Qatar. The Saudi Pro League side, who chose to rest in-form captain Ronaldo, rebounded from Philippe Coutinho's early opener at the Khalifa International Stadium to keep intact their 100 per cent record in this year's competition. Nassr now have 12 points from four matches to sit top of Group E.

Ronaldo, who scored twice two weeks ago in Riyadh in the Saudi Arabian club's 4-3 home win against the same opponents, was rested for the corresponding fixture by Nassr manager Luis Castro. On Tuesday, Duhail went ahead on eight minutes through Coutinho, when the former Liverpool and Barcelona midfielder slid in to finish Michael Olunga's low cross for his first Asian Champions League goal. The Nassr bench were in uproar, though, believing Olunga had fouled defender Mohammed Al Fatil in the build-up.

However, the visitors completely turned around the tie in a 10-minute spell late in the first half. First, Talisca exchanged passes with Abdulrahman Ghareeb at the edge of the Duhail area and curled a superb right-footed shot low into the bottom corner. Then, he collected a short pass from Sadio Mane and, from almost the exact position as his first, skidded a left-footed drive beyond rooted goalkeeper Salah Zakaria.

Talisca completed his hat-trick on 65 minutes, sweeping home a fine move after another one-two with Ghareeb. The treble lifted Talisca to six goals in his past three Champions League matches. Duhail did pull a goal back through Coutinho's 80th-minute penalty following Marcelo Brozovic's handball, but the home side later had substitute Khaled Mohammed sent off in stoppage time.

Also in Group E, two-time runners-up Persepolis strengthened their case for a place in the last 16



DOHA: Nassr's Croatian midfielder #77 Marcelo Brozovic is marked by Duhail's Qatari midfielder #23 Assim Madibo during the AFC Champions League Group E football match between Qatar's Al Duhail and Saudi's Al Nassr at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha. — AFP

with a 1-1 draw at Istiklol in the Tajikistan capital of Dushanbe. The Iranians had taken an early lead, but were pegged back by the hosts 16 minutes from time.

Meanwhile, UAE side Al Ain became the first western Asian club to qualify for this year's knockout stages, courtesy of a 3-2 win at Al Fayha in Riyadh. Togo's Kojo Labja struck twice for the 2003 champions to take his tally to five goals in this year's competition as Al Ain top Group A with 12 points from a possible 12. In the group's other match, Uzbeks Pakhtakor stay second following a 1-1 draw at Turkmenistan's Ahal FK.

In the eastern side of the competition, Japan's Kawasaki Frontale moved to the brink of qualification to the last 16 with a 4-2 home win over Thailand's BG Pathum United. The victory ensured Kawasaki maintained their 100 per cent record at the top of Group I, with Johor Darul Ta'zim and South Korean champi-

ons Ulsan Hyundai on six points apiece following the former's 2-1 victory at home in Malaysia. Ulsan are two-time Asian champions, in 2012 and 2020.

In Group G, Japanese side Yokohama F Marinos are joint-top after their hard-fought 2-1 win at Philippines' Kaya FC-Iloilo in Manila. Chinese Super League side Shandong Taishan are level with Yokohama on nine points, thanks to a 3-1 home victory against South Korea's Incheon United in Jinan. Incheon lie third, three points back with two rounds remaining.

The group stage, which this year returned to a home-and-away format for the first time since early 2020, runs until mid-December, with the 10 pool winners and the six best second-placed teams advancing to the knockout rounds starting in February. The final takes place, across two legs, in May. — AFP

Nuno sacked by Saudi club Al Ittihad

RIYADH: Al Ittihad have sacked former Tottenham Hotspur manager Nuno Espirito Santo, the Saudi champions said, following a poor run of results under the Portuguese coach. Nuno was under pressure because of their struggles in the Saudi Pro League, and the club brought down the axe following a 2-0 defeat to Air Force Club of Iraq in the Asian Champions League on Monday.

Nuno, who enjoyed a successful spell as Wolverhampton Wanderers boss from 2017-2021, had been in charge of Jeddah-based Al Ittihad since July last year. The former Porto coach took Al Ittihad to the Saudi title last season, but there were reports of a difficult relationship with striker Karim Benzema, who joined the club in June this year as part of the influx of foreign stars into the Pro League.

"The club has announced the end of its contract with Portuguese coach Nuno Santo," Al Ittihad said in a statement posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "This decision comes after a comprehensive technical evaluation of the past phase during which he was in charge of coaching the first football team."

Assistant coach Hassan Khalifa will take temporary charge while the club finalize a replacement for Nuno, the statement said. Nuno was appointed Tottenham manager in the summer of 2021, but lasted just four months before he was sacked. — AFP

Atlanta down Columbus to level series

LOS ANGELES: Argentina World Cup winner Thiago Almada scored on his return from suspension as Atlanta United defeated Columbus Crew 4-2 to level their MLS Cup Eastern Conference playoff series on Tuesday.

Almada, the newly crowned Major League Soccer Young Player of the Year, chipped in an exquisite 88th-minute goal to put the seal on an emphatic win for Atlanta, setting up a winner-takes-all game three decider in Columbus on Sunday.

The 22-year-old South American midfielder's goal capped a vibrant second half display from Atlanta, who had been well-beaten 2-0 in the opening game of the best-of-three series last week. Greek international Giorgos Giakoumakis opened the scoring for Atlanta on 38 minutes, soaring high to power home a thumping downward header after a superbly flighted cross from the right flank by Brooks Lennon.

Columbus got back on level terms however in the 45th minute, with Cucho Hernandez rifling home an opportunistic low shot from eight yards after Atlanta gave the ball away in a dangerous position. But Crew's parity was short-lived, with Atlanta's Portuguese winger Xande Silva scoring in first-half stoppage time to restore United's lead.

Georgia international Saba Lobjanidze made a jinking run down the right and passed to Giakoumakis, who laid off into the path of Silva to lash home the finish. Silva should have made it 3-1 on 61 minutes but somehow scooped his shot over an open goal from five yards out.

Atlanta's greater attacking invention reaped its reward though on 83 minutes when substitute Edwin Mosquera swept a shot into the top corner after another flowing move. Almada added a fourth on 88 minutes, deftly dinking over the advancing Columbus goalkeeper Patrick Schulte to make it 4-1 before Crew substitute Max Arfsten scored a late consolation goal deep into injury time. — AFP

Ton-up Stokes stars as England stop rot against Netherlands

PUNE: Ben Stokes' maiden World Cup hundred set up a 160-run win for England over the Netherlands in Pune on Wednesday as the struggling champions climbed off the bottom of the table. Victory ended a five-game losing streak, with England having long since ceased to be in semi-final contention.

But just their second win of the 10-team tournament maintained England's hopes of a top-eight finish that would qualify them for the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan. England were in trouble at 192-6 after yet another batting collapse before Stokes' 108 and 51 from fellow all-rounder Chris Woakes took them to 339-9 in 50 overs. The Netherlands were never in the hunt, collapsing to 179 all out inside 38 overs, Woakes and David Willey striking with the new ball before spinners Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid took three wickets each.

"I'm more pleased for us to get a victory over the line, it's been a tough World Cup," said Stokes. England talisman Stokes, battling a longstanding knee injury, made a painstaking fifty in 58 balls and then accelerated, taking just 20 more deliveries to reach his fifth one-day international century.

He was well-supported by Woakes as England added 124 runs in the last 10 overs to finish on 339-9. Test skipper Stokes, 32, eventually holed out in

the last over for 108. A target of 340 always looked like it might be beyond non-Test side the Netherlands, who had twice defeated England at the T20 World Cup but lost all six of the teams' previous ODI meetings.

England came into this match rock bottom of the table but opener Dawid Malan led the way with a 36-ball fifty that featured 40 runs in boundaries after skipper Jos Buttler won the toss. England, however, lost two wickets in quick succession.

Joe Root fell for 28 in bizarre fashion when bowled between his legs by Logan van Beek attempting a reverse scoop. And 133-2 became 139-3 when Malan was run out in sight of his second hundred of the tournament when sent back by Stokes going for a needless single.

Harry Brook gave his wicket away before Buttler and Moeen both fell tamely in single figures. Stokes, dropped in the deep on 41 off a tough chance, survived a tight lbw review before smashing a no-ball from spinner Aryan Dutt—and the ensuing free-hit—for sixes.

He went into the 90s with another six, a straight drive off Bas de Leede. A reverse swept four off paceman Paul van Meekeren, his sixth of the innings, saw Stokes to a 78-ball hundred that included five sixes on a ground where he had played for Pune in the Indian Premier League.

Woakes and Stokes shared a seventh-wicket stand of 129. Van Beek—who bowled 10 wides—suffering in a return of 2-88. The Netherlands slumped to 13-2 in reply, Max O'Dowd chipping Woakes to mid-on before Colin Ackermann was caught behind for a duck off Willey. Several bats-



PUNE: England's Ben Stokes gestures during the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup one-day international (ODI) match between England and Netherlands in Pune. — AFP

men made it into the 30s, while Teja Nidamanuru was left stranded on 41 not out when last man van Meekeren was stumped off Moeen. — AFP

Kuwaiti Asian Games champions rewarded with Volvo cars by Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

Abdullah Al-Turqi, Yaqoub Al-Youha and Fahad Al-Ajmi honored, because triumph deserves recognition



(From left) Abdullah Al-Turqi, Fatma Hayat, Bader Al-Kharafi, Yaqoub Al-Youha and Fahad Al-Ajmi.



Volvo team in a group picture with Chairman of BNK Group Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi (center).



Kuwaiti champion Abdullah Al-Turqi takes a picture inside his new Volvo car.



Kuwaiti Champion Yaqoub Al-Youha receiving his Volvo car keys from Bader Al-Kharafi.



Yaqoub Al-Youha takes a picture inside his new Volvo car.



Fahad Al-Ajmi with his new Volvo car.

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Recognizing the significance of Kuwaiti athletes' achievements at the Asian Games, Chairman of BNK Group Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi honored champions Abdullah Al-Turqi, Yaqoub Al-Youha and Fahad Al-Ajmi by giving a Volvo car to each winner. During the event, Kharafi emphasized on encouraging the youth. "Our concern extends beyond sports. It is to encompass the youth as a whole, recognizing them as the future and pride of Kuwait. Consequently, it becomes a national duty for every capable Kuwaiti to honor and encourage their endeavors. Our support encompasses more than financial assistance — we firmly believe that moral support also plays a significant role. Today, we express our heartfelt gratitude to you, the champions who wave the flag of Kuwait high and fill our hearts with pride. May your achievements continue to soar to greater heights, unceasing in their magnitude. We stand united in our admiration for you," he said.

"The presence and visit of His Highness the Crown Prince to China laid the foundation for the champions' triumph, and his fatherly moral support is an inseparable part of this monumental achievement. Let it be known that the support we are celebrating today has been a collective endeavor, with the Olympic Committee under the leadership of Sheikh Fahd Al-Ahmad and Fatima Hayat," Kharafi added. Kharafi's monumental gesture signifies more than just material rewards — it symbolizes pride, inspiration and genuine appreciation.

World champion shooter Abdullah Al-Turqi won Kuwait's first gold medal in the championship. "While my participation in sports was never driven by financial gain, it is undeniable that rewards and gifts play a crucial role in assisting athletes and motivating them to persevere and excel. Thus, the recognition presented by Mr Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi is a genuine source of support, boosting athletes' determination to advance and triumph. This honoring gesture serves as a source of motivation for

athletes to enhance their performance and proudly represent their country," Turqi told Kuwait Times.

"Mr Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi has not only honored me once, but twice with a car, for which I am deeply grateful. His continuous support and efforts to boost our morale are truly commendable. I hope that others will follow in his footsteps, as he is a prominent figure who uplifts spirits and encourages young individuals to strive for higher triumphs. This, in turn, elevates the overall caliber of athletes. If such acts of recognition become more widespread and are adopted by other companies as well, it would not only promote the reputation of Kuwait, but also serve as a means of safeguarding the younger generation by motivating them to pursue sports and activities that contribute positively to the country's name, diverting them away from harmful paths such as drugs," Turqi added.

Yaqoub Al-Youha, a member of the Kuwait national team in strength sports, emerged victorious in the 110-meter hurdles race at the Asian Games in China, earning the esteemed gold medal. "Today's celebration not only fosters the growth of sports, but also in-

spires young individuals to pursue athletic endeavors. I am immensely grateful to all those who supported and stood by me throughout this journey, with a special appreciation towards Mr Bader Al-Kharafi for his generous gift and unwavering support. Every athlete finds great pride in their accomplishments, and what truly fuels their motivation is the encouragement and acknowledgment they receive. Personally, I contemplated retirement after Paris, but today I make the decision to strive forward and not give up until 2027, with the will of God," Youha told Kuwait Times.

Fahad Al-Ajmi won a gold medal in karate at the Asian Games. Ajmi told Kuwait Times that karate has been his passionate hobby since childhood, and he officially joined the national team at the age of 15. Although he traveled to various tournaments, it wasn't until 2022, during his first championship, the Asian Championship, that he achieved significant success. Competing in the under-21 category, he proudly secured the silver medal. The following day, he added another achievement to his name by winning the bronze medal in the same championship.



Fatima Hayat, member of Kuwait Olympic Committee and Chairwoman of Women Sports Committee speaking to Kuwait Times during Volvo Event.

This marked his debut in international competition.

Ajmi also highlighted that the Asian Games was not an easy challenge, accompanied by intense preparation. A rigorous 15-day training camp in Azerbaijan preceded the championship, but the hard work and dedication paid off as he and his team proudly represented Kuwait and secured the gold medal. The euphoria of standing on the podium, clutching the gold medal, and hearing his country's national anthem playing served as a gratifying reward for his efforts, alongside the Volvo car he has received from Bader Al-Kharafi.



Dr Ziad Al-Alyan (left) and Abdullah Al-Terkait.



Fatma Hayat (centre) with Kuwait Times staff Dhoha Al-Issa (left) and Jana Alnaqeeb.



Kuwait Times and Kuwait News team with Chairman of BNK Group Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi.