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## 49 KILLED IN MANGAF INFERNO

Amir expresses sorrow, orders swift probe • Modi expresses grief • Indian envoy visits the injured



Deputy Premier, Defense and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah visits the scene of the blaze. — KUNA



Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika visits an injured worker in a hospital. (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: Firefighters and security forces gather outside a building which was engulfed by fire in Mangaf on June 12, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MoI orders crackdown on violations • Prosecutor launches probe • Municipal officials suspended

### We share your grief



Shakir Reshamwala  
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Our hearts ache as we think about the tragic incident that took the lives of 49 residents in Mangaf. It's devastating to imagine the pain and sorrow their families and communities are going through right now. The victims had journeyed far from their homes, enduring separation from loved ones, in search of opportunities that would provide for their families.

The news of this terrible disaster has left us feeling deeply saddened and shocked, and we know many around Kuwait share these emotions. Each of the 49 victims had dreams and worked tirelessly to create a better life for themselves and their loved ones. Their determination and sacrifices are a tribute to the strength of the human spirit, which has been silenced by this tragedy.

In this difficult time, the thoughts and prayers of everyone at Kuwait Times are with the families of the victims. We hope they can find some comfort in knowing that their pain is felt by people across the country, and we stand together in solidarity with them.

Continued on Page 6

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** At least 49 workers, mostly Indian, were killed and dozens injured on Wednesday in a huge fire in a building in Mangaf, the worst building fire in Kuwait's history, triggering calls for action against real estate landlords and company owners who violate the law to house large numbers of foreign laborers in extremely unsafe conditions to cut costs.

The fire erupted just after 4:00 am, when the majority of the 196 all-men residents of the seven-storey building were asleep. It resulted in huge thick clouds of black smoke that led to the suffocation of most of the victims, according to officials from the interior ministry and the fire department. A foreign ministry statement said the "tragic" fire had "claimed the lives of 49 citizens of the Indian community residing in the State of Kuwait".

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber

### UN accuses Zionists of crimes against humanity, war crimes

**GENEVA:** A UN investigation concluded on Wednesday that the Zionist entity has committed crimes against humanity during the war in Gaza, including that of "extermination", while saying Zionist and Palestinian armed groups have both committed war crimes. The independent Commission of Inquiry's report is the United Nations' first in-depth investigation into the events of the war that erupted on Oct 7.

It found that the Zionist entity had committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL). The report noted "a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population in Gaza". "The commission found that the crimes against humanity of extermination; murder; gender persecution targeting

Continued on Page 6

the embassy is committed to render all possible assistance. Health Minister Ahmad Al-Awadhi said hospitals had received 56 people injured in the fire. Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika visited the site of the blaze and met injured people at hospitals. Modi also sent Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Kirti Vardhan Singh to Kuwait to oversee assistance of those injured and to coordinate with local authorities for the early repatriation of mortal remains of those who died.

India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar posted that he was "deeply shocked by the news" and offered "deepest condolences to the families of those who tragically lost their lives". He spoke on the phone with his Kuwaiti counterpart Abdullah Al-Yahya, who "expressed the condolences of the leadership, government and people of Kuwait", the foreign ministry statement said.

The Indian Embassy in Kuwait put in place an emergency helpline number +965-65505246, saying

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GAZA: A displaced Palestinian girl sits in a damaged building in which she took refuge in Al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on June 12, 2024. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait mourns as fire kills 49

## MoI vows resolute response to building violations



KUWAIT: Interior Undersecretary General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday visited Mubarak Hospital to check on the condition of persons injured in the apartment building fire that occurred in Mangaf earlier in the day. (Center) Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika visits the Al-Adan Hospital where over 30 Indian workers were admitted following a major fire incident in Mangaf on Wednesday.



KUWAIT: The death toll of a fiery fire that gutted a multi-storey building in the southern district of Al-Mangaf early on Wednesday has jumped to 49, the Ministry of Interior announced. Major General Nasser Abu-Slaib, the MoI Security Information Director, affirmed in a press release that the landlords of burned buildings would be stiffly penalized.

Personnel of the MoI's directorate general of criminal evidence are investigating the causes of the fire and identifying some victims. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has ordered the relevant officials to instantly follow up on the tragic occurrence, seek to identify its

causes, and bring those responsible to account.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's public prosecutor has started an investigation into a fire that tore through a building housing expat workers in the southern Mangaf area. The probe aims to uncover the circumstances behind the incident and what might have triggered the deadly inferno, the public prosecutor said on social media platform X, praising the state-wide response to the disaster.

First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah has warned that any building violation would be addressed without prior warning as of

Thursday. The minister gave the warning in the aftermath of the fire incident. "As of Thursday, the Municipality and its teams will respond to all violations at all apartment buildings without prior warning," the minister told reporters while inspecting the fire site. The owner of the blaze building will be kept in custody until investigations into the causes of the fire are over, the minister pointed out.

### Minister suspends officials

Minister of Public Works and Minister of Municipality Dr Noura Al-Mashaan suspended on Wednesday administrators at the Al-Ahmedi

Municipal branch pending investigations into the fire that engulfed a building in the Mangaf area. In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr Al-Mashaan affirmed that she instructed the municipality to open a full investigation into the matter. On his part, Director General of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous expressed deep condolences to the families of the victims, affirming that an investigation was launched to determine the cause of the blaze. The suspended administrators were replaced by colleagues from other branches until the investigative process was concluded, he affirmed. — KUNA



Keep it Fresh: Nature & Nostalgia Exhibition



Ambassador of Canada Aliya Mawani (center), Reza Doust and Ofillia Right pose for a group photo.



Visitors look at Reza Doust's artwork. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## CAP, Canada Embassy present Keep it Fresh: Nature & Nostalgia

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) collaborated with the Embassy of Canada to present the Keep it Fresh: "Fresh & Nostalgia" Solo Exhibition, showcasing the artistic creations of Reza Doust, a talented Iranian Canadian artist. The Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Aliya Mawani showed her support to culture-based events, saying: "I believe culture serves as a very important bridge that binds people together. Amidst political discourse, it's also essential to delve into the personal level to truly grasp each other's sentiments, fostering deeper understanding, therefore, I'm happy to attend this exhibition, as Reza Doust embodies the essence of Canada."

Reza Doust is an Iranian Canadian and he is a perfect example of Canada being a country that is built on immigration and built on diversity. We are full of layers, we are not one thing or the other, we are a combination of different identities and backgrounds, and so Reza, being an Iranian Canadian, is a perfect example of ways of being, and that I think is very Canadian. The exhibition's theme of presentness and vitality resonates beautifully.

We strive to support exhibitions by Canadian artists as we consider their thematic relevance. I



think that relationships between countries thrive on human connections. Canadians often perceive Kuwait through personal encounters with Kuwaiti individuals, just as Kuwaitis form positive impressions of Canadians through similar interactions. In the end, our goal is to unite people and spotlight the talents and perspectives of both Canadians and Kuwaitis.

On his part, Reza Doust, a full-time artist elaborated: "In my recent works, I explore subjects such as daily life, historical narratives, and, occasionally, my own experiences. To convey my spontaneous feelings about the repetitive nature of life and for those constrained by it in their quest for daily sustenance, time, culture, and history, I sought a large

canvas to capture that overwhelming voice more realistically—it's almost deafening. My thoughts dwell on routine, tradition, modernity, existence, love, justice, and the essence of life itself."

The exhibition is curated by Maryam Nia, an artist, graphic designer, and yogini whose creativity comes alive at the vibrant intersection of culture, medium, and spirit. In Keep it Fresh: "Nature & Nostalgia", Maryam stewards her unique cross-cultural consciousness to curate new work by Reza Doust. As a collaboration between two culturally hybrid creatives with global identities, this exhibition serves as an expansion of both artists' lifelong exploration of the tender fruit that is borne from the soulful alchemy of diverse worlds.

press statement that the valves team at the chest hospital completed the first training programs for doctors as part of the series of training programs to train the catheterization doctors in the MENA and Eastern Europe regions.

The training includes how to build an integrated program to treat heart valve diseases through catheterization and how to select the suitable valve for each patient. There is also training on reading the CT scan image of the aortic valve to prepare for the procedure. Head of the Catheterization Unit at the hospital, Dr Khalid Al-Merri, said the program also includes the use of ultrasound for catheterization implantation in the blood vessels and how to deal with possible complications in such operations.



## Chest hospital trains medics for rare operations

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The head of the cardiology department at the chest hospital, Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi, said the hospital is the first training center for carrying out the implantation of the aortic valve by catheterization in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe. Al-Enezi said in a

In my view

## The final goal

Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh



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A war has begun in some Gulf countries and has spread to other Arab nations — a war against the Arabic language. Commercial outlets and restaurants do not display even a single Arabic word in their names, whether projected or hidden. If an American were to visit our countries, he might be astonished by this love for a foreign language, a phenomenon not seen in other countries.

The official language of our states is being sidelined, not even written in small fonts. This trend, invented by some Arab capitals, has spread to many of our countries and is beginning to infiltrate Islamic and Arab strongholds such as Madinah and Makkah. In the Cairo of Amr Ibn Al-Aas, I asked a Syrian vendor who had a display on a famous complex's road why he did not write his store's name in Arabic alongside the English. His answer, which carried much sadness, was that the complex's owners required that all writing be in English only.

Who are these individuals with significant capital earned from our lands, attempting to eradicate our language completely? They are the enemies of the Arab nation who wish to keep us backward. They are not satisfied with maintaining us as a consuming nation that spends the abundant wealth Allah granted us without productivity, development or factories — only consuming goods from East and West and flaunting trademarks.

They strongly seek to erase our culture and deprive us of our identity. Imam Al-Shafi'i once said, "People did not become ignorant and differ, except because they left the language of the Arabs." Al-Hasan al-Basri spoke about the losers, saying speaking in foreign languages destroyed them. Is the ultimate goal to keep the next generations in hidden ignorance, losing their ability to comprehend and innovate?

Who is behind this? The fight against our Arabic language is led by organized groups with abundant money who do not care about profits. A good businessman typically seeks profits, but these individuals seek losses. Many refrain from dealing with their companies or restaurants because they do not understand the language or due to their values that prevent them from entering establishments that do not respect their culture. This is an open war on the Arabic language, and in war, losses are not important; victory is. Will they achieve victory, making Arabic an extinct language? If so, who will read and understand the Holy Quran? This is their ultimate goal.

Local

# Zain assists, sees off hajj pilgrims

Company presents top roaming plan at no cost



A group photo of Zain and Ministry of Awqaf teams.

KUWAIT: Zain participated in seeing off hajj pilgrims departing from Kuwait International Airport to Saudi Arabia, wishing them a safe and prosperous journey. This initiative is part of the company's ongoing strategic collaboration with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, through which Zain provides all its customers performing hajj with its top roaming plan at no cost, keeping them connected with their loved ones.

Zain's team was present at Kuwait International Airport's Departures Hall to share the joys of this spiritual occasion with the departing pilgrims and their families. The company distributed special gifts to the travelers and presented its annual complementary offer featuring its top roaming plan (Roaming Plus) to all customers who are registered in this year's ministry-certified hajj campaigns.

The free offer includes 30 local minutes, 30 minutes to Kuwait, and 30 SMS messages per week, in addition to 3 GB of daily Internet (fair usage policy applies daily after exceeding 3 GB, after which speed is reduced until end of day). The offer runs from June 9-22 and is only valid at hajj rituals locations. Zain presents this initiative every year to keep



Zain holds this initiative every year during hajj season.

customers who travel to the Sacred House connected to each other and to their loved ones at no cost during hajj season. The company continuously offers services that are tailored to match its customers' expectations and needs during their travels.

## Crown Prince welcomes GCC chief



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jaseem Al-Budaiwi at Bayan Palace on Wednesday. During the reception, the GCC chief congratulated His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on the recent decree issued by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah appointing him as Crown Prince. — KUNA

## Kuwait ranks first in 5G technology

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Omar Al-Omar said that Kuwait achieved first place globally and regionally in terms of leadership in 5G technology, according to GSMA Intelligence. In a press statement Wednesday, Al-Omar said that Kuwait achieved a result of 68 points, representing the score for 5G for the year 2023, as this index measures the country's performance in spreading and using 5G technology in several categories.

He explained that the index measures include infrastructure, service provision, and user experience, and that according to the index, Kuwait is the leader globally and regionally, indicating a strong implementation and integration of 5G technology within the country. The total score for 5G reflects the technical capabilities of the 5G network and the effectiveness of exploiting these capabilities to enhance connectivity, drive innovation, and improve services for users.

The minister said that achieving the highest score in the world indicates that Kuwait has greatly succeeded in setting a standard for 5G excellence in the country, showing its superiority in this crucial aspect of digital transformation. Kuwait's score on the index level takes into account factors such as network coverage, speed, reliability, and the range of services that enable 5G, making it a major indicator of technological progress and a driver of economic growth. Al-Omar noted that Kuwait achieved first place in the world in the ICT Development Index (IDI) for the year 2023 issued by the International Telecommunication Union, as Kuwait topped the index, surpassing 169 countries.

He explained that this index consists of 10 indicators divided according to two basic pillars: global communication and purposeful communication, and they are assessed by the International Telecommunication Union on a scale ranging from zero to 100 points, where 100 indicates that the Internet connection performance has reached its highest levels. According to the index, Kuwait achieved first place with a total score of 98.2 points, while Singapore came in second globally with a total of 97.4 points, and Qatar came in third with 97.3 points, stated Al-Omar. — KUNA



Kuwait Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, holds a ceremony as part of the activities marking the fifth anniversary of the unanimous adoption of a Kuwaiti draft resolution regarding missing. — KUNA photos

## UN addresses issue of missing persons on anniversary

VIENNA: Kuwait Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, held a celebration ceremony on Tuesday, attended by the UN Security Council in Geneva and representatives of the group of countries of the International Coalition for the Missing People. Al-Hayen told KUNA after the ceremony that this

celebration comes on the occasion of the fifth anniversary, which falls on June 11th, after the unanimous adoption of a Kuwaiti draft resolution by the UN Security Council under No 2474 regarding missing people and prisoners, which Kuwait was honored to present.

During its membership in the Security Council in 2018-19, Al-Hayen added that the desired goal behind Resolution 2474 is to urge all countries to implement this resolution by taking more effective measures to prevent cases of disappearance of people in response to the urgent and right calls of their families who seek peace of mind by clarifying their fate. Al-Hayen said that Kuwait seeks to strengthen cooperation regarding missing people,

including Kuwaiti prisoners, with the Iraqi side and through the tripartite committee and members of the coalition, so that there will be greater cooperation to reveal their fate.

At the conclusion of his statement, Al-Hayen explained that the Kuwaiti resolution, which was unanimously adopted but not limited to Iraq, affects an international issue present in all conflicts from World War I until now. There are missing people who have no trace, and Resolution 2474 stresses the necessity of finding appropriate mechanisms to reveal the fate of missing people. On June 11, 2019, the UN unanimously adopted Resolution 2474. The Council called upon parties to armed conflict to take all appropriate measures, to actively search for

persons reported missing, to enable the return of their remains, and to account for persons reported missing "without adverse distinction".

Through the text, the Council also called upon parties to armed conflict to take appropriate measures to prevent persons from going missing, to pay the utmost attention to cases of children reported missing, and to register and notify the personal details of persons deprived of their liberty, including prisoners of war. It further called upon states, in cases of persons missing resulting from armed conflict, to take measures, as appropriate, to ensure thorough, prompt, impartial, and effective investigations and the prosecution of offenses linked to missing persons due to armed conflict. — KUNA



Participants are pictured during the first Hajj Media Forum.



## Hajj Media Forum provides integrated media environment

JEDDAH: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) participated on Wednesday in the first Hajj Media Forum organized by the Saudi Ministry of Information in the Holy City of Makkah. The forum aims to provide an integrated media environment that allows journalists and media professionals to access information and details related to the hajj season and get an inside look at all the preparations and efforts made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to ensure safe hajj rituals. The forum has 11 comprehensive media zones, an interactive media exhibition that highlights technical and technological services to serve the pilgrims, a headquarters for press conferences, a media center with integrated services, various studios and future projects in the holy sites. — KUNA



Technological equipment displayed at the Forum.



A robot designed to help the pilgrims at the Hajj Media Forum. — KUNA photos



## Minister issues new advert regulations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Public Works and Minister of Municipal Affairs, Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, affirmed Wednesday the importance of the new advertisement regulations, which address the aesthetics and appearance of advertisements found on the streets. In a statement to KUNA, Dr Al-Mashaan stressed the keenness to expedite the issuance of advertisement regulations based on Ministerial Decree No 599 of 2023 in regards to the visual pollution resulting from the unregulated and uncomely appearances of current advertisements.



Dr Noura Mohammad Al-Mashaan

The Municipality's efforts are significant in ensuring advertisements adhere to specific and aesthetic standards, reducing visual clutter that negatively impacts Kuwait and its people, Dr Al-Mashaan added. The new advertisement regulations, Dr Al-Mashaan elaborated, are set to prioritize high-quality advertisements that are consistent and abide by regulation standards. Advertisements are to be monitored, and violations will be penalized, she added. — KUNA

## KPC and KNOC ink MoU on strategic oil storage

KUWAIT: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) to store four million oil barrels in South Korean Ulsan city. In a statement to KUNA on Wednesday, KPC mentioned that the MoU is an application of corporate strategy on storing oil near vital markets to guarantee Kuwaiti oil supply on the Asian continent.

Signing the MoU are KPC President Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah and KNOC Chief Dong Sub Kim in Seoul, the South Korean capital. According to the statement, Sheikh Nawaf voiced his pride in the relations between the two countries, especially as South Korea is Kuwait's second-largest receiver of Kuwaiti oil, accounting for 19 percent of total oil exports.

KPC's official, Sheikh Khaled Ahmad Al-Sabah, mentioned that the marketing sector succeeded in creating strategic storage opportunities, adding that this MoU comes after success in providing storage space in Japan. Kuwait's total crude oil exports and products to South Korea reached a total of 286.2 million barrels in 2022–2024. — KUNA

# Cabinet calls for non-oil income diversification

## KIA, state bodies urged to scale up investment efforts



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over the Cabinet meeting. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet asked the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and other concerned state bodies to scale up investment efforts and tap investment opportunities to diversify non-oil income sources and create new jobs for Kuwaiti youth. This came during the Cabinet's customary weekly meeting held at Bayan Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Cabinet also tasked Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Mahmoud Bushehri, who is in charge of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR), to legally withdraw farmland from those involved in using their plots for illegal activities and purposes.

However, it voiced support for farm owners who use their farmland for purposes in line with the law and the PAAAFR's regulations, expressing sincere thanks and appreciation to the First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah, and senior security officials and personnel for their efforts in busting law-breakers and anyone involved in drug trafficking.



Meanwhile, the Cabinet approved the minutes of a high-level nationality verification committee, which included the withdrawal of nationality from several people who had gotten it illegally, based on Law 15/1959 for Kuwaiti nationality.

The Health Ministry was also entrusted in coordinating with other state agencies to put a national health survey project in place as soon as possible with a view to revamping the country's public health. The Cabinet, in the meantime, congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, along with the Kuwaiti people and residents, on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha.

On this occasion, the Cabinet decided to halt work at all ministries, state bodies, and public institutions between Sunday (June 16) and Tuesday (June 18) as an official holiday nationwide marking Eid Al-Adha. Finally, the ministers mourned the death of former minister of trade and industry Abdulwahab Al-Nafisi, recalling his great efforts and sincere contributions to serving the country. — KUNA



## KRCS distributes Eid packages to refugees in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed on Wednesday Eid Al-Adha packages to Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. Lebanese Red Cross relief coordinator Youssef Boutros

told KUNA that the KRCS and the Lebanese Red Cross began distributing the packages—containing clothes and other materials—to some 2,000 refugee families. He revealed that the KRCS would be distributing sacrificial Eid Al-Adha meat to needy Lebanese families, in addition to Syrian and Palestinian refugees throughout the country. He revealed that last week the KRCS began aiding Lebanese in the south of the country affected by military confrontations, which began last October. Some 6,000 Lebanese families benefited from the relief aid operations, Boutros affirmed. — KUNA



## Kuwait Airways announces first flight to Salalah

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced Wednesday its first flight to Oman's Salalah, with three scheduled flights per week on Sunday, Tuesday and Friday. In a press release, Kuwait's national carrier explained that electing the city of Salalah as a destination came after a meticulous study of the market and demand, explaining that this is in line with the airline's strategy of expanding network and diversifying options. Salalah is a destination with much to offer, including a moderate climate, tourist attractions, natural landscapes, and historical sites. Kuwait Airways was first established in 1953 as a private company and operated its first flight in March of 1954. The Kuwaiti government gained full ownership in 1962.

### 1.1 million passengers

In another development, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on Wednesday that the number of passengers that traveled to and from Kuwait Inter-



national Airport last May reached 1,151,421. Acting Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety and Air Transport Affairs Abdullah Al-Rajhi said to KUNA that Kuwait's International Airport witnessed a rise in flights by two percent and in airfreight by 28 percent.

He affirmed that last May, the number of arrivals reached 532,841 and the departures reached 618,580. He noted that the number of flights operated from and to Kuwait International Airport reached 9,959, compared to 9,744 in 2023. Al-Rajhi added that air cargo reached a total of 20.4 million kg, inbound cargo reached 16.8 million kg, and outbound cargo reached 3.5 million kg. He stated that the most popular destinations in May were Dubai, Cairo, Istanbul, Doha and Riyadh. — KUNA



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Greece bakes in earliest-ever heatwave

## Hungary to allow greater NATO support for Ukraine

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SAFAD: A firefighting aircraft releases flame retardant to extinguish fires caused by rockets launched from southern Lebanon which landed on the outskirts of the occupied Palestinian city of Safad, on June 12, 2024.

# Hezbollah rains rockets on Zionist entity

## Group promises intensified attacks after Zionist strike kills Hezbollah top commander

**BEIRUT:** Lebanese militant group Hezbollah fired barrages of rockets at the Zionist entity on Wednesday and vowed to intensify its attacks after a Zionist strike killed a senior commander in south Lebanon the previous day. Hezbollah and the Zionist forces have traded near-daily cross-border fire since October 8, following the Hamas attack on the entity. The exchanges have escalated in recent weeks, with Hezbollah stepping up its use of drones to attack Zionist military positions and the Zionist entity using targeted strikes against the militants.

"We will increase the intensity, strength, quantity and quality of our attacks," said senior Hezbollah official Hashem Safieddine, speaking at the funeral of commander Taleb Sami Abdallah, who was killed in Tuesday's Zionist strike. Hezbollah in statements said it launched "dozens of Katyusha rockets" at three bases and a barracks in the north of the entity. The Iran-backed militant group said it also struck a "military factory" with guided missiles "in response to the assassination carried out by the Zionist enemy".

The Zionist army said more than 150 "projectiles" had been fired from Lebanon in three successive barrages. "Approximately 90 projectiles were identified crossing from Lebanon," it said, adding several were intercepted but others struck inside the entity, sparking fires in parts of the north. The initial barrage was followed by a second of about 70 projectiles and a third of around 10, the military said, adding the army struck several sites in south Lebanon in response. In Doha, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken renewed calls Wednesday for a



BEIRUT: The coffin of Taleb Abdallah (portrait), known as Abu Taleb, a senior field commander of Hezbollah, is carried during his funeral in Beirut's southern suburbs on June 12, 2024. — AFP photos

diplomatic solution on the Zionist-Lebanon border and said a long-sought Gaza ceasefire deal would "take a tremendous amount of pressure out of the system".

### 'Knight of the resistance'

As temperatures have soared in recent days, the exchanges of fire have sparked brush fires on both sides of the border. "(Zionist) Fire and Rescue Services are currently operating to extinguish the fires that broke out as a result of the launches," the military said. The

Zionist entity's Magen David Adom emergency medical service said there were no immediate reports of casualties. The Zionist forces on Wednesday confirmed it had "eliminated" Taleb Sami Abdallah in a strike the day before on a Hezbollah command center in southern Lebanon. In a statement, it called Abdallah "one of Hezbollah's most senior commanders in southern Lebanon" and said he "planned, advanced, and carried out a large number of terror attacks against (Zionist) civilians". Abdallah was killed along with three

Hezbollah comrades in a Zionist strike on Jouaiyya, 15 kilometers (nine miles) from the border, a source close to the group told AFP. A Lebanese military source said the commander was "the most important in Hezbollah to be killed... since the start of the war".

The group had urged its supporters to attend Abdallah's funeral in the southern suburbs of Beirut, describing him as "one of the knights of the resistance". Men wearing military fatigues and black berets carried his coffin, covered in Hezbollah's yellow flag, as a brass band played for the ceremony. Pro-Hezbollah newspaper Al-Akhar described the strike that killed Abdallah as "a harsh blow" to the group. But Britain-based Middle East specialist Amal Saad played down the prospect of wider escalation. "I don't think that the death of this highest-ranking commander is going to change any of Hezbollah's calculations," she said, adding civilian casualties were "red lines" for the group rather than the targeting of commanders or fighters. "We witnessed an escalation in quality and quantity of (Hezbollah) attacks in order to put pressure on (the Zionist entity) and the US in the ceasefire talks and improve Hamas' bargaining position," Saad said. On Tuesday, Hezbollah said it fired about 50 rockets at Zionist positions in the annexed Golan Heights. More than eight months of cross-border fighting has killed at least 468 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters but also including 89 civilians, according to an AFP tally. Zionist authorities say at least 15 Zionist soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. —AFP

## 2 suspected militants, trooper killed in Indian Kashmir clashes

**SRINAGAR:** Two suspected militants and a paramilitary trooper were killed and six security personnel wounded in clashes in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said Wednesday. The first incident occurred late Tuesday night in Hiranagar, a village near the frontier with Pakistan which, like India, claims the Himalayan region in full.

Security forces rushed to the border village, with a man killed in the initial gunfight who police believed had crossed over from the Pakistan side. "Another militant who was hiding in the area and firing intermittently was also killed later," a police spokesperson told AFP, adding that a paramilitary soldier who was wounded during the clash died in hospital.

Police said both militants were suspected to have crossed recently from Pakistan and had been asking villagers for water. Hours later, suspected rebels threw grenades and fired at an army checkpoint in the remote Doda area around 100 kilometers (60 miles) to the north, wounding six soldiers and a police officer.

The wounded personnel were taken to hospital for treatment, police senior superintendent Javid Iqbal told AFP. "A search operation is on in the forest area," he said. The incidents came days after a gunman opened fire on a bus full of Indian pilgrims returning from a Hindu shrine in the southern Kashmir district of Reasi, killing nine and wounding dozens.

Survivors at a hospital told AFP on Tuesday that the attacker continued firing on the bus for several minutes after it crashed into a ravine. Army special forces and police have launched a manhunt in a vast forested area and released a sketch of the attacker, announcing a reward of \$24,000 for information leading to his location.

India has around 500,000 soldiers permanently deployed in Kashmir. The three back-to-back incidents follow an uptick in militant attacks in the southern Hindu-dominated areas of the Muslim-majority territory. — AFP

## Zionist forces 'actively' support settler violence: Palestinians, activists

**DUMA, Palestine:** As violence surges in the occupied West Bank, Palestinians and human rights groups decry an increasingly blurry distinction between the Zionist army and settlers, emboldened by the current pro-settlement government.

In the West Bank, the "line that never really existed between the army and the settlers" has now "been completely erased", said Joe Carmel, advocacy coordinator for Breaking the Silence, an anti-occupation NGO made up of former soldiers who served with the Zionist army. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 1,096 settler attacks on Palestinians in the territory between October 7 and March 31. That represents an average of six attacks per day, up from two a day in 2022.

Human rights group Yesh Din, which also records settler violence, said 2023 was already a peak year. With each attack, a similar story - armed settlers, sometimes wearing the army's khaki fatigues, attack Palestinian villagers, burn their houses and cars, and steal their livestock, sometimes under the passive gaze of soldiers. On April 13, Palestinians in the northern West Bank village of Duma watched in terror as hundreds of settlers attacked their village and stabbed a villager after a Zionist teenager who often visited a nearby settlement outpost was found dead. On April 22, the army announced it had arrested a villager on suspicion of murdering the teenager.

### 'Protect all residents'

That day, the Zionist army "was present inside the village to ensure the security of settlers and protect them" during their raid, village council chief Suleiman Dawabsha told AFP. A Zionist military spokesman told AFP that troops in the West Bank were there to "protect the property and the life of all residents and disperse clashes". Not counting annexed east Jerusalem, more than 490,000 Zionists live in the West Bank in settlements considered illegal under international law, alongside some three million Palestinians. The expansion of the settlements has gathered pace under successive governments since the Zionist capture of the West Bank in the 1967 Arab-Zionist war but has accelerated sharply under the pro-settlement administrations of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Since the start of the Zionist war in Gaza, at least



BURQA: A Palestinian man walks past burnt out vehicles stationed in a car park following a reported Zionist settler attack in the town of Burqa, east of the West Bank city of Ramallah on June 7, 2024. — AFP

537 West Bank Palestinians have been killed by soldiers or settlers, according to the Palestinian Authority. At least 14 Zionists have been killed in Palestinian attacks in the territory over the same period, according to Zionist official figures. On October 13, a settler shot 20-year-old Zacharia Al-Adra at point blank range as he was leaving a mosque in the village of Al-Tuwani in the southern West Bank. Soldiers "saw everything" but didn't move, according to his wife Shouq al-Adra, 24. Zacharia was critically wounded.

Pointing to what he said was a sociological change taking place in the army over the past decade, Carmel of Breaking the Silence said religious Zionist settlers have now become more visible in uniform and among senior officers. Since the war in Gaza began, "we've seen that some settlers were wearing army uniform," Ehud Krinis, a 57-year-old activist who lives in the Zionist entity and helps Palestinians in the Hebron region, told AFP. Human Rights Watch denounced the ambiguity, saying that the Zionist entity was responsible for the increase in settler violence over the past eight months.

### 'Active participation'

Human Rights Watch investigated five attacks perpetrated by settlers in five different Palestinian villages between October and November 2023, and concluded in April that "the (Zionist) military either

took part in or did not protect Palestinians from violent settler attacks in the West Bank". "Evidence shows that armed settlers, with the active participation of army units, blocked roads and attacked Palestinian communities on several occasions: they have detained, assaulted and tortured inhabitants, and evicted them from their houses and land," HRW concluded. In April, UN human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva that "(Zionist) security forces must immediately end their active participation in and support for settler attacks on Palestinians". "(Zionist) authorities must instead prevent further attacks, including by bringing those responsible to account." Moayyad Bsharrat, advocacy director for the Palestinian Union of Agricultural Work Committees, said that settlers saw the inclusion of far-right settlement champions Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich in the Zionist government as a "green light" to attack Palestinians.

Carmel says the Netanyahu government's goal is clear - "to strengthen the settlement movement and, in so doing, to make it impossible for Palestinians to have any chance of gaining an independent state". The Zionist army told AFP that it looks into "complaints about soldiers' behavior that is not in accordance with orders". But Carmel said that settlers and violent soldiers are only condemned "in very rare cases". — AFP

## International

# Hungary to allow greater NATO support for Ukraine

## Washington, Kyiv to sign security deal; Zelensky spotted in Saudi Arabia

**BUDAPEST:** NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban agreed on Wednesday that Budapest would "not block" the defense alliance from contributing more to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion. The talks came hours before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was reported to be in Saudi Arabia, his latest visit to the Gulf kingdom which has sought to stay neutral in Ukraine's war with Russia. Zelensky landed in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah for the unannounced trip and was greeted by Saudi officials including the national security adviser and ambassador to Kyiv, the official Saudi Press Agency said. Further details on his visit were not immediately available. Zelensky's visit doesn't appear to be long as the White House announced US President Joe Biden and Zelensky will sign a bilateral security deal Thursday at a G7 summit in Italy.

### A way forward

Orban and NATO's Stoltenberg have finally agreed on a way forward in Ukraine discussions on Wednesday after long negotiations. The deal includes Hungary not blocking efforts by Stoltenberg to get NATO members to pledge to keep supplying at least support worth 40 billion euros (\$43 billion) a year to Ukraine for as long as it takes. Stoltenberg, who has been touring NATO members, is trying to hammer out a plan to be announced at a summit in Washington next month for NATO to play a bigger role in coordinating weapons deliveries and training for Kyiv's forces.

Hungary has objected, claiming it could drag the alliance into the war with Russia. It has already refused to supply arms to Ukraine. As Moscow's closest EU ally despite its invasion of Ukraine, Orban is increasingly stoking fears of a war between the West and Russia, which he blames on Brussels and NATO.

The nationalist premier recently also suggested that he would like to "redefine" the position of Hungary in the alliance to prevent any participation in operations "outside NATO territory".

Orban hailed "a difficult but constructive negotiation" with Stoltenberg. "Today, we received guarantees that in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, Hungary will not have to participate in military actions



**JEDDAH:** Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on June 12, 2024. — AFP

outside its territory," Orban told reporters at the joint press conference. "Hungary will neither contribute money nor send people to this war, nor will Hungarian territory be used for involvement in this war," he added. However Orban warned the "challenging period is not over", vowing to keep advocating for "decisions that align with Hungary's interests" after the NATO summit.

### NATO's increasing frustration

NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels Thursday will now look to seal the final agreement on NATO's role in weapons deliveries ahead of the summit. The other 31 countries in the alliance appear on board with the plan - although diplomats said there remain some technical details to finalize.

Diplomats from some NATO countries have expressed skepticism about granting Orban a formal opt-out, arguing that sets a bad precedent inside the alliance. Some diplomats have been getting increasingly frustrated with Budapest - one of the NATO countries friendliest to Moscow.

One diplomat said that "in recent months especially" Hungary's opposition had become a growing

issue inside the US-led alliance. NATO has so far avoided being directly involved in weapons deliveries to Ukraine, for fear it would move it closer to conflict with Russia. Instead, it has left it to Kyiv's main backer, the United States, to coordinate arms sent by alliance members. Officials and diplomats say the reason for NATO to take more of a role now is to try to ensure deliveries could continue even if Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump were re-elected and pulled the plug on US support.

### 'Sending a signal'

US President Joe Biden and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky will sign a bilateral security deal Thursday at a G7 summit focused on backing Kyiv's fight against Russia's invasion, the White House said. "Tomorrow, President Biden and President Zelensky will sit down to discuss our strong support for Ukraine now and into the future," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters traveling with Biden to Italy.

"Following that meeting, the leaders will sign a bilateral security agreement, making clear our support will last long into the future." The deal

would not include any commitment to use US forces but would involve weapons and assistance for Ukraine, which Washington has backed since the 2022 invasion, said Sullivan. It was similar to other deals signed between Ukraine and 15 other allies, he added. "Any lasting peace in Ukraine has to be under its own ability to defend itself," Sullivan said. "By signing this, we'll also be sending Russia a signal of our resolve to Vladimir Putin. He thinks that he can help mask the coalition supporting Ukraine. He's wrong."

Kyiv swiftly welcomed news of the deal. "We have come a long way in our cooperation with the United States, and the entire team has done a great job to make this future agreement possible," said Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's office.

The United States announced earlier Wednesday a raft of new sanctions aimed at constraining Moscow's war in Ukraine while raising the stakes for foreign banks that still deal with Russia, ahead of G7 talks. The Treasury Department and State Department's sanctions hit more than 300 targets, including entities in Russia and in countries like China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. — AFP



**BUDAPEST:** NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (L) and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban arrive to a joint press conference in Karmelita monastery, the Prime Minister's office in Budapest on June 12, 2024.

## Armed Syrian Kurdish women safeguard precious wheatfields

**AL-QAHTANIYAH, Syria:** Holding a weapon in one hand and fixing her scarf with the other, Yasmine Youssef patrols one of northeast Syria's vast wheatfields, a vital source of income in the country's breadbasket. The 42-year-old is among dozens of volunteers, some of them women, helping the semi-autonomous Kurdish-led region protect the fields near Qahtaniyah, from fires and arsonists. "Our mission is to serve farmers and protect their crops," Youssef said, adding that the work lasts one or two months. "If fires break out we are notified directly and we call the fire trucks," she told AFP.

This year the farmers in northeast Syria are expecting an exceptional harvest after heavy rain followed years of drought. But residents also fear that yearly summer wildfires could destroy their precious crops. "Agricultural production rebounded in 2023 amid improved weather conditions" after near-historical lows the year before, according to a recent World Bank report. "Official statistics indicate a doubled wheat harvest for 2023, yielding two million metric tons," it said.

In June 2019, flames swept through wheatfields in the region, killing at least 10 people who were fighting the fires, according to the Syrian Observa-

tory for Human Rights war monitor. At first, "people didn't trust our efforts. They were saying, 'What are those women doing?'," Youssef said. "Now everyone agrees on the need to unite to protect" the land, she said. "The people depend entirely on this harvest ... If we lose it, our conditions will deteriorate."

### A strategic asset

Nearby, farmers toiled in the scorching heat, ploughing the golden fields as Kurdish police also patrolled the area. Northeast Syrian wheat is a strategic asset for the semi-autonomous administration, providing bread for people who live in the area.

Every year, the administration and the Syrian government, which accuses the Kurds of separatism, compete to buy the wheat harvest from farmers. Residents and officials in the Kurdish-held region told AFP they believed the fires were often the result of arson.

Islamic State group extremists have previously burnt crops in areas under Kurdish control, after the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces - the Kurds' de facto army in the area - dislodged the jihadists from the last scraps of Syrian territory they held in 2019.

Volunteer Renkin Hassan, 50, urged people not to discard cigarettes that could start fires accidentally, but also blamed unspecified parties for "burning the land intentionally". "We will not let them do that," she said defiantly, patrolling beside other armed volunteers and wearing a military vest. "I don't own a single acre of land, but I come here every day so farmers can harvest their crops" without having to worry about fires, she added.

There have already been limited outbreaks of fire

said the investigation team from the department has collected material to determine the cause of the fire, adding around two dozen cooking gas cylinders were found on the building's ground floor.

Mousawi said that the work of the fire teams was hindered by the presence of many violations inside and outside the building, adding that five firemen were injured in the process. Forensic experts from the criminal evidence department of the interior ministry also were at the scene and collected material to investigate the cause of the fire.

An Egyptian worker who was in the building told reporters from his hospital bed that it took him two hours to get out of the building with the help of firemen, adding that while going down the stairs, he saw several charred bodies. The man, who suffered light injuries, said that the overwhelming number of residents of the building are Indian, but there are a few Pakistanis and Filipinos too. There is another Egyptian in the building, he said.

Reacting to the tragic incident, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs Noura Al-Mashaan ordered the director of Kuwait Municipality Saud Al-Dabbous to suspend top officials related to the incident. Dabbous immediately suspended four top officials from Ahmadi Municipality and ordered an investigation into suspected violations in the affected building and other buildings in the area.

The Mangaf building fire incident is the worst building fire in Kuwait and the second largest fire disaster in the country with regards to the death toll. In August 2009, a woman angry that her husband was getting married to another woman, set his wedding tent ablaze, killing 56 women and children in Jahra.

News and comments on the blaze became the top issue on social media as people called for fundamental action to crack down on violators and trafficking in persons. A former minister said the fire incident should be used to open wide the corruption files regarding trafficking in unskilled workers and violations in expat workers' accommodation, in addition to violations in buildings and safety conditions.

A former lawmaker charged that the "legalization" of illicit trafficking in persons coupled with the negligence of government authorities to monitor housing of workers "have led to catastrophic results, which eventually took



**AL-QAHTANIYAH:** A volunteer in the Kurdish Community Protection Forces guards wheatfields from fire or looting around the town of Tarbesbeyeh, also known as Al-Qahtaniyah in Arabic, in northeastern Syria's Hasakeh Governorate near the Turkish border on May 30, 2024. — AFP

in several locations this year, local authorities said. The volunteers brave high summer temperatures and sometimes surprise attacks by IS jihadists, as well as Turkish strikes targeting the SDF.

Sporting an assault rifle, flip-flops and a flowery

dress, Atia Hassan, 50, said her goal was to prevent arsonists from "burning the land - and to protect ourselves". "People are happy when they see us ... and we are proud of our efforts despite all the difficulties," she added. — AFP

## 49 killed in Mangaf inferno...

### Continued from Page 1

Deputy Premier, Defense and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Youssef Al-Sabah rushed to the site and toured hospitals where injured workers were taken for treatment. He ordered the arrest of the Kuwaiti landlord of the building and the Egyptian guard of the building, and warned officials not to release them without his permission.

The minister told reporters that the fire is a catastrophe, adding that from Thursday, teams from the municipality will begin inspecting all buildings and have the authority to remove any violation without any warning. Sheikh Fahad added the Public Authority of Manpower will also start from tomorrow to study the issue of overcrowding of expat workers in buildings and the failure to comply with safety conditions. Interior Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Gen Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah later visited injured victims who have been hospitalized.

The public prosecution has started an investigation into the fire to uncover the circumstances behind the incident and what might have triggered the deadly inferno, it said on X, praising the state-wide response to the disaster. There has been no official word on how the blaze started or what caused it. Some local media reported that it could be a gas leak from the building's ground floor.

Head of investigations at Kuwait Fire Department Col Sayed Al-Mousawi said that the team investigating the causes of the fire found that an inflammable material was used as partitions between apartments and also between rooms, which caused the huge black clouds of smoke. He said that many of the victims suffocated while trying to run down the stairs because they were filled with smoke, adding that the victims could not go to the rooftop because the door was locked.

Mousawi said that the fire teams rescued a large number of workers by putting out the fire in under 10 minutes of arrival, adding the fire department received an emergency call at 4.23 am and the teams arrived at 4.28 am. He

us to the tragic Mangaf fire". "If the government does not hold the 'greed mafia' accountable ... and start the strict implementation of the law without any exceptions, and lay down practical solutions to the problems of manpower and the disorder in the population structure, catastrophes and disasters will happen again and only poor people and the society will pay the price," he said.

A law consultant said that over 40 people were killed because of the negligence of authorities and the greed of businessmen "who have no fear of God". He questioned who will give protection to some expats from the oppression of their sponsor (kafeel). An associate professor said the unfortunate incident highlights the disdain and greed of real estate landlords in Kuwait and the failure of government authorities to strictly apply the law.

## We share your grief...

### Continued from Page 1

This heartbreaking incident is a stark reminder of how fragile life can be and the significance of showing compassion and providing support. Let's not only mourn the loss of these 49 individuals but also take meaningful action to ensure that such tragedies are prevented in the future by advocating for improved safety standards and protections for all workers, no matter where they come from or what they do.

As we grieve, let's also celebrate the resilience of the human spirit. The path ahead for the families and friends of the victims will be challenging, but they will not be alone. We must direct our thoughts, prayers and resources to offer them comfort and practical support during this incredibly difficult time.

Today, we mourn the loss of these 49 precious lives. Let's find the strength to honor their memories and work towards creating a world where all workers are treated with safety, dignity and respect in their remembrance.

## UN accuses Zionists of crimes against...

### Continued from Page 1

Palestinian men and boys; forcible transfer; and torture and inhuman and cruel treatment were committed," it added. The commission found that in that attack, members of the military wings of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups and Palestinian civilians committed war crimes, as well as violations and abuses of IHL and IHRL. The unprecedented Commission of Inquiry was established by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate alleged violations of IHL and IHRL in the Zionist entity and the Palestinian territories.

Since October 7, the three-member commission has focused on the Gaza war between the Zionist entity and Hamas. "It is imperative that all those who have committed crimes be held accountable," said the commission's chair Navi Pillay, a former UN rights chief and an ex-International Criminal Court judge. "(The Zionist entity) must immediately stop its military operations and attacks in Gaza. 'Hamas and Palestinian armed groups must immediately cease rocket attacks and release all hostages. The taking of hostages constitutes a war crime.' The report said Zionist authorities "failed to protect civilians in southern (Zionist entity) on almost every front". In their actions in Gaza, the commission found the Zionist authorities "responsible for the war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare, murder or willful killing, intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects, forcible transfer, sexual violence, torture and inhuman or cruel treatment, arbitrary detention and outrages upon personal dignity".

Starvation will affect the Gaza population, particularly children, "for decades to come", the report said, while "the siege it imposed... constitutes collective punishment and reprisal against the civilian population, both of which are clear violations of IHL". In the West Bank, the commission found that Zionist forces committed acts of sexual violence, torture and inhuman or cruel treatment and outrages upon personal dignity, "all of which are war crimes". — AFP

## International

## Greece bakes in earliest-ever heatwave

## Athens Acropolis closes • tourist season expected to be 'difficult'

**ATHENS:** The Athens Acropolis, Greece's most visited tourist site, was closed to the public during the hottest hours of Wednesday as the season's earliest-ever heatwave swept the country, prompting school closures and health warnings. The culture ministry had said the UNESCO-listed archaeological site would close from midday to 5:00 pm (0900 to 1400 GMT), with temperatures expected to reach 43 degrees Celsius (109 degrees Fahrenheit) on Wednesday and Thursday.

The first heatwave of the year in Greece, regularly hit by searing summer temperatures, is due to peak over those two days, and the ministry said the measure could be extended. Meteorologists have noted this is the earliest heatwave — which for Greece is temperatures exceeding 38 degrees Celsius for at least three days — in recorded history.

"In the 20th century we never had a heatwave before June 19. We have had several in the 21st century, but none before June 15," said state TV meteorologist Panos Giannopoulos. The climate crisis and civil protection ministry has warned of a very high risk of fires in the Attica region around Athens. Schools will stay closed in several regions of the country on Wednesday and Thursday, including in the capital, while the labor ministry has advised public-sector employees to work from home. The ministry also ordered a pause from midday to 5:00 pm for outdoor work including food delivery, to Thursday.

Sheltering under a parasol, electrician Fotis Papous said he had started his workday a few hours earlier, at 6:00 am, on orders from his employer. "With this kind of heat, it would be too risky otherwise," said the 46-year-old as he tinkered with an electricity meter near Athens's central Syntagma Square.

But for staff working over the grill in Greece's already-buzzing tourist Plaka district, there is no room for respite. "We have no choice, it's the start of the tourist season," said kebab store owner Elisavet Robou. "We have air-conditioning and fans, and staff are allowed to take breaks, but unfortunately the



**ATHENS:** Tourists sit in the shade outside the ancient Acropolis hill during a hot day in Athens on June 12, 2024. — AFP

climate crisis is here." "Heatwaves came earlier this year and the season will be difficult," she said.

An air-conditioned hall has been opened at Syntagma metro station in central Athens to give the public somewhere to shelter from the heat, the public transport authority said. In Greece's second city Thessaloniki, teachers and pupils said annual school

exams were held under difficult conditions.

"There was no air-conditioning in any of the rooms so we used fans, some of whom the teachers brought from their own homes," said Andreas Karagiannis, a 52-year-old mathematician and examiner. "Exams should not have been held under these conditions," said 17-year-old pupil Yiannis Theodoridis.

The Acropolis was forced to close in July last year during a two-week heatwave that was unprecedented in its duration. A record number of almost four million visitors flocked to the site last year, with its popularity boosted in part due to tourists arriving on cruise ships calling in at the nearby port of Piraeus. — AFP

## New Caledonia vote reform that sparked riots 'suspended'

**PARIS:** President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that a voting reform that triggered deadly riots in French Pacific territory New Caledonia would be "suspended" in light of snap parliamentary polls. Instead, he aimed to "give full voice to local dialogue and the restoration of order" after weeks of unrest in which nine people died, Macron told reporters at a Paris press conference.

The reform would have allowed people resident in New Caledonia for at least 10 years to vote in local ballots — unfreezing electoral rolls that have gone unchanged since 2007. Indigenous Kanaks feared the change would dilute their vote among the 270,000-strong population, putting hopes for eventually winning independence definitively out of reach.

Although approved by both France's National Assembly and Senate, the reform was waiting on a constitutional congress of both houses to become part of the basic law. "I have decided to suspend it, because we can't leave things ambiguous in this period," Macron said.

In fact, with the National Assembly dissolved ahead of the election, the congress could not have been held by the deadline of June 30 — the day voters will now go to the polls in the first round of the election. Violence broke out in New Caledonia on May 13 in response to parliamentary votes backing the reform.

Barricades, skirmishes with the police and looting killed nine, injured hundreds and inflicted hundreds of millions of euros (dollars) in damage. Pro-independence movements had already seen the voting reform as dead and buried given Macron's call for snap elections in the wake of his camp's European Parliament poll drubbing on Sunday.

"We can all agree that the European elections saw off the constitutional bill," the Kanak Liberation Party (Palika) said Wednesday before Macron's remarks. "This should be a time for rebuilding peace and social ties," it added. — AFP

## Migrants wait for answers in Texas heat

**LOS FRESNOS:** Behind metal fences topped with barbed wire, men play volleyball and basketball at a detention center in Texas, passing time as they wait to hear if they will be allowed to stay in the United States. They are among more than 1,000 men housed at this former naval base in the US city of Los Fresnos, just a few miles from the Mexican border, which they all crossed illegally.

Tens of thousands of people walk into America every week through informal crossing points along the 2,000-mile (3,000-kilometer) frontier, bringing hopes and dreams from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Most of them turn themselves in and request asylum. Families are usually released quickly on the promise of appearing before an immigration judge in the future. But single men and women end up in centers like this one.

Miguel Vergara, director of the local Office of Enforcement and Removal Operations, said the US government has designated the Port Isabel Detention Center as a place where certain groups of migrants are kept. "Individuals who pose a national security risk, a danger to public safety, who undermined our border control efforts, or (who) crossed into the United States recently," he told reporters on Monday.

Last week, President Joe Biden, seeking to address an issue many see as a liability five months out from his presidential election contest with Donald Trump, announced an executive order intended to stem the flow of people coming into the country. The order will allow the border to be effectively shut to asylum claimants once 2,500 people have been processed in a day. It also makes it easier to deport people, a key demand on the US right, with Trump and others saying — without evidence — that criminals are swarming the country.

## Color-coded uniforms

Port Isabel holds only men. When they arrive at the facility, they are sent to holding cells with cream-colored walls and thick doors. On the walls of the cells, which can hold between 10 and 20 people, information is posted in 15 languages. The men remain in these cells for a maximum of 12 hours before being classified and given a color to wear: blue



**LOS FRESNOS:** Detainees play outside during a media tour of the Port Isabel Detention Center (PIDC) in Texas on June 10, 2024. — AFP

uniform for first-time migrants, orange for those with some kind of criminal record and red for those considered dangerous.

After a medical check-up and any necessary treatment, the men are taken according to uniform color to what will become their new homes for as long as they are at the facility. In the housing areas, detainees have access to ATMs which can be used to deposit any money they have, or for relatives to send them cash, which they can use in the facility's vending machines.

## Activities

Outside the center, which shimmers in the heat of the vast Rio Grande Valley, signs prohibit hitchhiking. Cameras watch from all angles, generating the displays on a bank of monitors inside an air-conditioned control room, where guards can also see almost every corner of the facility.

No one is supposed to stay in a place like this for more than 90 days, but administrators admit that can easily slip as cases go to appeal. Officials say they understand that confinement can be frustrating for these men, and say they do what they can to alleviate boredom.

Activities on offer include music classes often taught by a volunteer among the migrants. Other men use their time to learn or improve the English they hope one day to use to get a better job in America. One enterprising group of migrants offers hair-

cuts. There are movie nights, sometimes with films in the languages of the people detained.

Detainees are encouraged to take part in outdoor activities, but the hours can be curtailed by the punishing Texas sun. Some people paint, producing art that represents their hope for a new life—a mural of the Liberty Bell on the library wall stands testament to the dreams of one occupant.

## Waiting for a response

Migrants have access to private cubicles where they can speak with an immigration officer as they make their case to be allowed to stay. The response will come in writing; if it is negative, the detainee can appeal to a judge, who has a court at the detention center. Further appeals are possible all the way to the US Supreme Court. A definitive "no" results in deportation. Those who are granted asylum leave within 48 hours.

Anyone who wants to give up on the process can request a return to their home country. Biden's announcement last week did nothing to slow the number of people arriving here, officials say. On Monday, the facility had around 170 spaces, but, says Vergara, he expects it will be full again soon. "Migration... is shifting kind of towards the west, so it has perhaps diminished a bit, but it is only a matter of time before the facilities in the west get full and their detainees begin to get transferred down this way," he said. — AFP

## Cloud seeding claims overshadow record floods worldwide

**WASHINGTON:** Climate skeptics are scapegoating a weather modification technique known as cloud seeding to deny the role of global warming in historic floods that have recently devastated countries from Brazil to Kenya. Record rainfall brought to some regions by the natural weather cycle El Nino matches an expected increase in extreme events, experts say.

But online, claims have repeatedly been made that geoengineering — not carbon emissions — is to blame. "Dubai airport looks like an apocalyptic movie. Videos of the flooding are insane," said Robby Starbuck, a conservative American commentator, to his more than 460,000 followers on X in April, after the Gulf city was hit by unprecedented downpours.

"I've seen some blaming climate change when the cause is actually from the use of weather modification. Cloud seeding where chemicals are sprayed in clouds to create rain caused this." Claims that weather had been manipulated appeared after every major flood this year, including in Zimbabwe, the United Arab Emirates and other nations. According to Google Trends data, searches for cloud seeding reached a record high after the Dubai floods in April. "I have not agreed to our planet having cloud seeding everywhere, have you?" was typical of posts among X users in late May, blam-

ing the recent rainfall on a "man-made climate crisis."

Cloud seeding, which introduces tiny particles into the sky to induce rain over small geographical areas, has gained popularity worldwide as a way to combat drought and increase local water supplies.

But scientists say the technique cannot create weather — nor can it trigger rainfall at the scale observed in countries such as Germany and the United States.

"Due to the strong natural variability of clouds, there exists very little scientific proof that cloud seeding has indeed a measurable effect on precipitation," said Andrea Flossmann, co-chair of an expert team on weather modification at the World Meteorological Organization.

Experts, meanwhile, say climate change doubled the likelihood of floods in southern Brazil and worsened the intense rains caused by El Nino. "There's definitely a consensus that climate change is responsible for many of these extreme weather events," said Mariana Madruga de Brito, a Brazilian scientist from Rio Grande do Sul, the state that suffered historic flooding in May.

She told AFP she saw people posting photos of clouds on social media shortly after the floods, claiming they had been "fabricated" and questioning scientific institutions. But she insisted cloud seeding "cannot be causing events of this magnitude."

## Reinforcing climate denial

Di Yang, an assistant professor at the University of Wyoming, said extensive research over several decades has shown "no definitive large-scale or long-term impacts from cloud seeding." Still, the technique has become a recurring target for climate skeptics. AFP has debunked several false claims of weather manipulation after major floods in recent years.



**PASSAU:** A partial view shows a flooded street and the buildings along under water in the center of Passau in Bavaria, southern Germany, on June 4, 2024. — AFP

Callum Hood, head of research at the Center for Countering Digital Hate, said that as severe weather events become more frequent, "climate deniers are putting extra efforts into claiming these extremes have nothing to do with climate change." "You see this every summer now," he told AFP.

As more changes are recorded in seasons and ecosystems, Hood said "a slightly more conspiratorial and newer argument" is overtaking older narratives that simply deny Earth's warming "by trying to argue that

extreme weather events have this other cause, whether it's geoengineering or something else." Lincoln Muniz Alves, a researcher at the Brazil National Institute for Space Research, said the dissemination of false narratives not only obstructs effective communication during environmental crises but also "reinforces the views of those who deny the reality of climate change." Weather modification methods are controversial in the scientific community, due in part to the potential for unintended consequences such as excess rain and pollution. — AFP

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2024

# EU to slap extra tariffs of up to 38% on Chinese electric cars

Move after an anti-subsidy probe risks triggering a trade war



Shipping containers and gantry cranes are seen at Yantian port in Shenzhen, in southern China's Guangdong province on June 12, 2024.— AFP

## British economy stagnates heading into general election

**LONDON:** Britain's economy stagnated in April after emerging from recession in the first quarter of the year, official data showed Wednesday, dealing a setback to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ahead of next month's general election. The zero growth in April followed an expansion of 0.4 percent in March, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Britain votes on July 4 in an election widely expected to be won by the main opposition Labour party, a victory that would end 14 years of rule by Conservatives, who have been led by Sunak since 2022.

"There is more to do, but the economy is turning a corner and inflation is back down to normal," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in reaction to Wednesday's data. The Conservatives would "keep the economy growing with our clear plan to cut taxes on work, homes and pensions", he added.

The Labour party of Keir Starmer seized on the data to savage the economic record of the Tories. The "figures expose the damage done after 14 years of Conservative chaos", said Labour's finance spokesperson, Rachel Reeves. Britain had emerged from a short-lived recession with growth in the first quarter of this year. The UK economy contracted slightly for two quarters in a row in the second half of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession that was caused by elevated inflation that has prolonged a cost-of-living crisis.

"The stagnation in GDP in April doesn't mean the economic recovery has been extinguished, but it's hardly great news for the prime minister three weeks ahead of the election," noted Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics research group.

Looking to close the gap on Labour, Sunak on Tuesday promised voters tax cuts and lower immigration as he launched his party's manifesto. Sunak said his government would pay for lower taxes by cracking down on welfare payments to working-age recipients.

It came as official data Tuesday revealed a rise in British unemployment amid elevated earnings growth. A breakdown of April's output data showed services grew 0.2 percent, while production slid 0.9 percent and construction shed 1.4 percent.— AFP

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union threatened on Wednesday to hit Chinese electric car imports with additional tariffs of up to 38 percent from next month following an anti-subsidy probe, a move that risks triggering a trade war. Brussels provoked China's ire by launching the probe last year in a bid to defend European manufacturers. Hours before the announcement, Beijing warned that such a move would "harm Europe's own interests".

There is also dissent within the EU, with Germany, a major trade partner to China, saying the tariffs would harm German companies. The European Commission has now ordered a provisional hike of tariffs on Chinese BYD, 20 percent for Geely and 38.1 percent for SAIC. The commission said the amount depended on the level of state subsidies received by the companies. All other electric car producers in China which had cooperated with the commission's probe but were not sampled would face an average duty of 21 percent, it added.

The remaining BEV producers which did not cooperate with the investigation would be subject to a 38.1 percent duty. This would be on top of the current rate of 10 percent on all electric cars produced in China. To halt the extra tariffs being levied, Beijing and Brussels must resolve the subsidies issue.

"The Commission has provisionally concluded that the battery electric vehicles (BEV) value chain in China benefits from unfair subsidization, which is causing a threat of economic injury to EU BEV producers," it said in a statement. "Should discussions with Chinese author-

ities not lead to an effective solution, these provisional countervailing duties would be introduced," it added.

The tariffs will apply provisionally from July 4 and then definitively from November unless there is a qualified majority of EU states - 15 countries representing at least 65 percent of the bloc's population - voting against the move. China warned prior to the announcement that the tariffs would amount to "protectionism". "It goes against the principles of market economy and international trade rules, undermines China-EU economic and trade cooperation as well as the stability of the global automobile production and supply chain," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said.

"China will take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," he said.

Brussels launched the probe last year, with officials saying they wanted to put the brakes on what they claimed were unfair practices undercutting Europe's car manufacturers. The EU's tariffs, while high, are lower than the United States' 100-percent rate imposed from last month on Chinese electric cars.

Not all 27 EU member states welcome the commission's move. Germany, Hungary and Sweden already expressed reservations about the investigation and the push to slap higher duties.

"The European Commission's punitive tariffs hit German companies and their top products," German transport minister Volker Wissing wrote on X. "Cars must become cheaper through more competition, open markets and significantly better business conditions in the EU, not through trade war and market isolation,"

## World will amass 'major' oil surplus by 2030, says IEA

**PARIS:** The world is likely to have a major surplus of oil by 2030 as production is ramped up while the clean energy transition tempers demand, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday. Global demand is expected to "level off" at 106 million barrels per day (bpd) toward the end of this decade while overall supply capacity could reach 114 million bpd, the IEA said in an annual report.

This would result in a "staggering" surplus of eight million bpd that oil markets should prepare for, the Paris-based agency said. "As the pandemic rebound loses steam, clean energy transitions advance, and the structure of China's economy shifts, growth in global oil demand is slowing down and set to reach its peak by 2030," said IEA executive director Fatih Birol. With "a major supply surplus emerging this decade," Birol said, "oil companies may

want to make sure their business strategies and plans are prepared for the changes taking place."

The forecast comes days after the OPEC+ group of major crude producers signaled they would start to unwind output cuts this autumn, implemented in a bid to support prices against fears of weakening worldwide demand. In its report, the IEA noted that fast-developing Asian countries like China and India along with the aviation and petrochemical sectors would still drive oil demand, which stood at 102 million bpd in 2023.

But the shift toward electric cars along with fuel efficiency gains for conventional vehicles, and declining use of oil by Middle Eastern countries for electricity production, would help limit the overall demand increase to around four percent by 2030.

The IEA said demand in advanced economies is expected to continue a decades-long decline, falling from 46 million bpd in 2023 to less than 43 million bpd in 2030 - the lowest since 1991 apart from during the pandemic.

At the same time, oil production capacity appears set to surge, led by the United States and other countries in the Americas, leading to the forecast of

Wissing said. China is an important market for German car makers, while Hungary, which a month ago hosted a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping, is clearing land for a BYD factory to be built next year. Geely owns Volvo, the Swedish-based auto manufacturer.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce to the EU (CCCEU) warned the rates announced "will pose a serious market barrier" and slammed the "politically motivated and protectionism driven" investigation.

The CCCEU said the probe lacked "substantive and substantiated complaints from its domestic industry" since it was launched by the commission without a complaint from manufacturers. Chinese media ramped up threats that Beijing could target EU exports, including pork and dairy products, in the weeks running before the commission's decision. China is an important country for EU's agriculture sector and any move by Beijing could deliver acute pain to European exports.

EU exported dairy products worth around 1.7 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) last year, down from nearly 2.1 billion euros in 2023. The Asian country is the third destination for the EU's agri-food exports after Britain and the United States. China is the world's biggest car exporter and Europe is a critical market for it. EU imports of EVs from China mushroomed from around 57,000 in 2020 to around 437,000 in 2023, the US-based Peterson Institute for International Economics said. Ahead of the EU's move, Germany's Kiel Institute for the World Economy said in a report that a 20 percent tariff would mean 125,000 fewer Chinese electric cars to the EU, worth almost \$4 billion.— AFP



PARIS: Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Fatih Birol arrives to attend an official state dinner as part of US President's state visit to France, at the Presidential Elysee Palace in Paris on June 8, 2024.— AFP

an eight-million-barrel surplus - a level reached only during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020.

"Such a massive oil production buffer could usher in a lower oil price environment, posing tough challenges" for the US shale industry and the OPEC+ bloc led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, the report said. "Such a massive cushion could upend the current OPEC+ market management strategy aimed at supporting prices," it said.— AFP

## US inflation eases ahead of Fed rate cut decision

**WASHINGTON:** Fresh US consumer inflation data published Wednesday is unlikely to sway the Federal Reserve's plans to leave its key lending rate unchanged, but could alter how many rate cuts policymakers pencil in for this year.

The annual consumer price index (CPI) came in at 3.3 percent in May, down 0.1 percentage point from April and unchanged on a monthly basis, the Labor Department said in a statement - slightly below expectations. "Prices are still too high, but today's report shows welcome progress on lowering inflation,"

US President Joe Biden said in a statement after the inflation data were published.

The Republican Party, which is challenging the Democrats in November's elections, took a longer-term view of inflation, writing on X that "prices have now risen by 20.1 percent since Biden took office."

Despite the small drop last month, inflation remains stuck firmly above the Fed's long-term target of two percent, making it almost certain that the US central bank will vote to hold rates at a 23-year high of between 5.25 and 5.50 percent later on Wednesday, and wait for additional clarity on inflation.

"For the Federal Reserve it's very nice," Allianz Trade North America senior economist Dan North told AFP. "That's what they would like to see after almost two years now of restrictive monetary policy."

But, he added, "CPI has basically gone sideways for 12 months, so going from 3.4 to 3.3 (percent), it doesn't give us much." The US Fed has a dual mandate from

Congress to tackle inflation and unemployment, and recent data suggest it remains broadly on track to manage both without pushing the United States into recession.

With cuts almost certainly off the agenda for this meeting, Wednesday's action is likely to center around the economic forecasts from the 19 members of the Fed's rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), which will be updated for the first time since March. Analysts are looking to FOMC members to lower their individual forecasts for where rates will be at the end of the year in a chart known as the "dot plot," bringing down the median - or middle - number of projected cuts this year from three down to two or fewer.

"We continue to expect the first rate cut in September," Goldman Sachs chief economist David Mericle wrote in a note to clients published on Sunday. His team at Goldman sees the Fed moving to ease monetary policy every quarter after that, meaning a total of two 0.25-percentage-point cuts in 2024, and four in 2025.— AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: A customer shops at a Safeway store on June 11, 2024 in San Francisco, California.— AFP



## Business

# NBK is committed to aligning its strategic goals with Development Plan: Al-Sager

## Bank platinum sponsor of ENCON4 Forum of Major Kuwait's Development Projects

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) participated as a platinum sponsor of ENCON4 Forum of Major State Development Projects, organized by the Kuwaiti Federation of Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses (KFEOCH), in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Plan-

ning and Development (SCPD), and Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), under the motto "Transparency, Achievement, and Sustainability, Principles of the New Era."

In his speech during the event, Isam Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait, affirmed that the bank is committed to aligning its strategic objectives with Kuwait National Development Plan, as well as to cementing its position as

the first partner of the government in financing major strategic projects. "NBK recognizes the importance of cooperation and partnership, since no individual entity can achieve these visions, as they require the concerted efforts of government agencies, private and financial institutions to overcome the challenges and seize opportunities to build a better future for our country under the leadership of HH the Amir of Kuwait and HH the Crown Prince," added Al-Sager.

"We are optimistic that the new government, in light of the significant support it enjoys at the present time, will be able to address the major economic challenges and implement the long-awaited economic reform program," he noted.

"We are also confident that the government will prioritize development projects and focus on policies that attract investment and increase investment spending in order to boost confidence and promote business environment in Kuwait, as well as give special attention to projects that achieve economic benefits while promoting sustainable development," he remarked. "The steps we take today will determine the legacy we will leave behind for future generations," he emphasized.

ENCON4 aimed to attract investments and international companies, and to give the local and international private sector the opportunity to learn about the state's projects across all sectors in order to study these projects carefully to create competitive proposals to win their contracts. This will pave the way for Kuwait to enter a new era characterized by rapid accomplishment, transparency, and taking responsibility in implementing major development projects in the Country to achieve its sustainable development goals.

### Isam Al-Sager

- We are optimistic that the new government can address economic challenges and implement economic reform program
- We are confident that the government will prioritize development projects, boost confidence, and promote business environment in Kuwait

ning and Development (SCPD), and Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), under the motto "Transparency, Achievement, and Sustainability, Principles of the New Era."

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Dr Khaled Mahdi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development honors Isam Al-Sager on the sidelines of the forum.

The forum also highlighted the need to focus on major state development projects as the main concern, as the projects included in the government's plan are the way to achieve development in the short, medium and long term, and to restore Kuwait's role and leadership.

NBK maintains its leadership as the main bank for financing mega deals and projects, benefiting from its solid financial position, extensive experience, in addition

to the exceptional and sustainable relations with clients, both locally and internationally.

It also continues to seize opportunities on the local and regional levels, based on its historical role in leading alliances of mega deals and financing major strategic projects across many sectors, bolstering its leading position as the bank of choice for leading local and regional companies in financing their expansion plans.

## Production starts at Senegal's first offshore oil field

DAKAR: Senegal joined the club of oil-producing countries on Tuesday as Australian group Woodside Energy announced that production had started in the West African country's first offshore project. While Senegal's fossil fuel output is not expected to be as high as that of bigger producers such as Nigeria, there are hopes the oil and gas industry will bring billions of dollars in revenue to the country and contribute to transforming its economy.

"This is a historic day for Senegal and for Woodside," said the company's chief executive, Meg O'Neill, calling the extraction of "first oil" from the Sangomar field "a key milestone". The floating facility is moored about 100 kilometers (60 miles) offshore. The vessel has a storage capacity of 1.3 million barrels, Woodside said. The deepwater project aims to produce 100,000 barrels of oil per day. The field also contains natural gas.

Woodside has an 82-percent stake in the deepwater project with the remainder held by Senegal's state-owned energy company Petrosen. The discovery of oil and gas fields in 2014 raised great hopes for the economy of Senegal, among the 25 least developed countries in the world. Petrosen estimates the sector could generate more than \$1 billion per year over the next three decades. Petrosen general manager Thierno Ly said the start of production marked "a new era" for Senegal's "industry and economy". "We

## Climate holdout Japan drove LNG boom in Australia

VIENNA: Without funding from Japan, many of Australia's gas projects wouldn't have gone ahead. Massive public loans from Japanese taxpayers are propping up Australia's now-enormous fossil gas industry. Japan is also becoming a major gas trader and today exports more gas to other countries than it imports from Australia. Even as the world rapidly shifts to a clean energy future, Japan is emerging as a fossil fuel holdout. The world's fourth biggest economy, Japan has long been dependent on foreign sources of fossil fuels. Even as China has filled its deserts with solar farms, Japan has focused on gas.

These projects make it harder for Australia to achieve its climate goals and undermine the shift to



have never been so well positioned for opportunities for growth, innovation and success in the economic and social development of our nation," he said. The Phase 1 development of the Sangomar field comprises 23 wells, 21 of which have been drilled.

Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who took office in April, announced the renegotiation of oil and gas contracts as part of reforms he promised during the election campaign. While meeting students in Dakar on Tuesday, Faye vowed that profits from developing the country's gas and oil resources would be "well managed". "The State of Senegal has set up an inter-generational fund. For your generation and those

clean energy industries. New gas projects threaten to divert workforce and investment away from these export industries. But this can change. As Australia spends big on green power, green manufacturing and green exports - as part of the government's Future Made in Australia policies - the enduring partnership between the two nations could go green.

Developing new clean energy partnerships with energy-hungry Asian nations such as Japan, China and South Korea could boost climate cooperation, grow new clean energy exports and promote investment. Worried about energy security, Japan is subsidizing new offshore gas projects in Australia which probably wouldn't go ahead otherwise. Japan is the world's largest provider of international public finance for gas production. While other nations - including Australia - have pledged to end international finance for fossil fuels, Japan has kept the money flowing.

For example, last month, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation provided Australia's biggest gas corporation, Woodside, with A\$1.5 billion in loans to develop the Scarborough gas field offshore from

to come, we have reserved shares (in the resources derived from oil exploitation)," Faye told the students after the announcement of the first barrel from Sangomar.

Senegal also has a liquefied natural gas project at its border with Mauritania and production there could begin in the third quarter. The Greater Tortue Ahmeyim LNG project - which involves British energy giant BP, US firm Kosmos Energy, Mauritanian oil and gas company SHM and Petrosen - aims to produce around 2.5 million tons of LNG per year. Several African countries are pursuing oil and gas projects despite pressure on nations worldwide to phase out fossil fuels, which generate climate-heating greenhouse gases. — AFP

Western Australia. Japanese power utility JERA also received \$1.2 billion from the Japanese bank to acquire a 15 percent stake in the project, gaining rights to a share of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) produced. Without this kind of financial support, new gas projects would be less likely to proceed.

It is not certain other funders would step in. Gas production in Australia is relatively expensive, due to remote locations and high operating costs. Over the past decade, Australian gas projects have typically been delivered late and over budget and have delivered poor returns for investors.

In the years ahead, Australian gas projects will struggle to deliver gas at internationally competitive prices. In 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered a surge in demand for LNG. Now, the world is facing a massive oversupply of gas. In two years time, large new LNG volumes will come online from lower-cost producers in the Middle East - mainly Qatar - and in North America, just as demand for gas falls in key markets. The Australian government's own analysis projects a much lower price of LNG from these producers than the cost of production in Australia.

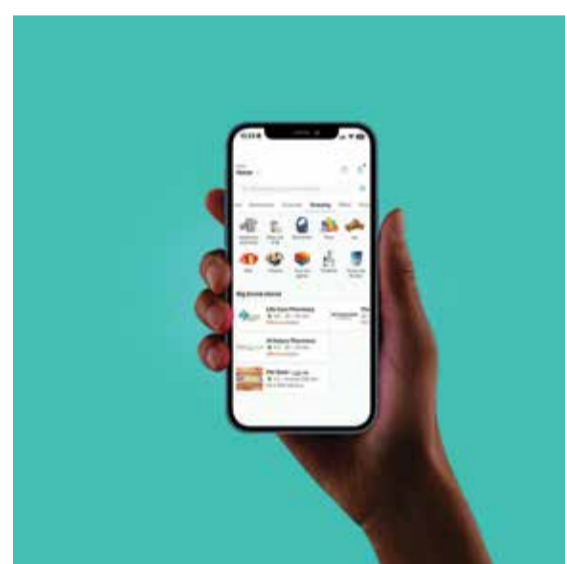
If we left it up to the market, Australia's increasingly uncompetitive gas exports would lose market share. But it's not being left up to the market. Japan is underwriting new gas projects to make money-losing projects seem viable. And that makes it much harder for Australia to shift to a lucrative green economy. Last year, Japanese ambassador Yamagami Shingo claimed Australian gas exports were crucial to keeping the neon lights of Tokyo glowing.

In reality, Japan is now reselling more LNG to other Asian nations than it imports from Australia. Japanese gas corporations are contracted to buy more gas over the next decade than Japan will use at home, and are planning to sell excess gas in other markets in Asia.

This is a direct result of official policy, which aims to create new demand for gas in Southeast Asia by offering financial support for gas import terminals and gas-fired power plants and supporting Japanese corporations to supply that demand. This is not hidden. It's an open goal. By 2030, the Japanese government wants its corporations to "handle" 100 million tons of LNG each year - far more than Japan will use to meet its own energy needs. Why? Japan's government sees maintaining influence in the region's LNG market as important to its own energy security. — Reuters



Massive public loans from Japanese taxpayers are propping up Australia's now-enormous fossil gas industry.



## Deliveroo launches 'Deliveroo Shopping'

KUWAIT: Deliveroo Kuwait launched 'Deliveroo Shopping', a new online retail offer which will bring consumers a world of retail options on-demand, alongside its existing restaurant food and grocery offering. This expansion comes in response to a notable surge in demand for non-food items on the platform. Globally, beauty and personal care products, for instance, have seen 320,000 monthly searches, while searches for consumer electronics have increased by 59 percent year-over-year.

'Deliveroo Shopping' marks a major milestone in Deliveroo's growth strategy and seamlessly aligns with the company's commitment to fulfilling consumers' evolving needs. In addition to the unparalleled convenience of ordering from their favorite restaurants and grocery partners, customers can now indulge in a curated selection of retail options spanning Health & Pharmacy, Flowers, Electronics, Pet, Baby & Child, Toys & Games, Home & Kitchen, Toiletries, Stationery, Party, and Gifts.

Proudly collaborating with renowned retail partners, Deliveroo Kuwait now offers customers the opportunity to shop from a variety of local and international brands. In the health and pharmacy category, Deliveroo customers can shop for everything from gym to health essentials at Life Care Pharmacy, Pharmazone and Oxygen. In the electronics category, customers can enjoy shopping at some of the largest phone and digital products companies in the country, including Mobile 2000 and Telefonati. In the Toiletries category, customers can snag their favorite beauty products at Inglot, Al Nasaem, Kefan Optics, and The Face Shop. From the flowers category, customers can also enjoy ordering beautiful arrangements from local flower shops like Italian Flowers, Pooji Flowers, and Holland Gifts. Finally, families and friends can shop for their little ones at Sniggles and Mama's First and also spoil their fur babies with treats from Pet Zone and Smart Pet.

Deliveroo is also rolling out a new gifting functionality in the app wherein consumers can select and mark an item as a 'gift' at checkout; they can then send receivers a trackable link to their order with an animated greeting card - perfect for sending flowers or surprising a loved one with something special.

Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager of Deliveroo Kuwait & Qatar, said: "Deliveroo Shopping marks a pivotal milestone for Deliveroo, and is a product of extensive research that has pinpointed a demand for seamless, on-demand delivery across specialized non-food domains. With the launch of our latest shopping feature, Deliveroo is poised to revolutionize the online shopping landscape, enabling customers to shop for last-minute toys, toiletries, home & kitchen, gift categories, and more with the same effortless convenience they have come to expect during meal times."

All retail partners and products are conveniently housed under the 'Shopping' section of the app, offering a one-stop shop for users.

## Business

# Moody's affirms Burgan Bank's credit rating with stable outlook

Rating reflects the strength of Burgan brand, its solid profitability, the quality of its assets

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced that Moody's Ratings (Moody's) has affirmed its long-term local and foreign currency bank deposit ratings at "Baa1" with a stable outlook and its short-term local and foreign currency bank deposit ratings at "P-2".

Meanwhile, the global credit rating agency affirmed the Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) and Adjusted BCA at "ba2", the long-term local and foreign currency Counterparty Risk Ratings at "A3", the long-term Counterparty Risk Assessment at "A3(cr)", the short-term Counterparty Risk Ratings at "P-2", and short-term Counterparty Risk Assessment at "P-2(cr)".

Moody's further clarified that the "Baa1" long-term deposit ratings of Burgan Bank benefit from four notches

of rating uplift from the Bank's BCA, reflecting the agency's view of a very high probability of support from the government of Kuwait, which holds an "A1 stable" credit rating.

As per the agency's disclosure, Burgan Bank's standalone BCA of "ba2" reflects its resilient pre-provision income and enhanced capital buffers, as well as comfortable liquidity and deposit-driven funding, against higher than peers' nonperforming loans (NPLs) and high related-party exposures.

Furthermore, the agency showed that the stable outlook on Burgan's long-term deposit rating reflects Moody's view that the Bank's solid recurring profitability and strong problem loan provisioning coverage will continue to balance risks arising

from credit concentrations and challenging foreign markets in which it operates. Commenting on Moody's credit rating disclosure, Khalid Al-Zouman, Chief Financial Officer at Burgan Bank, said: "The affirmation of Burgan Bank's ratings by an esteemed financial institution such as Moody's is a profound testament to the Burgan brand and its sound profitability, as well as the quality of its assets, capital buffers, and solid funding base."

Al-Zouman asserted that Burgan Bank continues to act upon its strategic pillars of asset re-allocation, digital transformation, human capital development, and adopting ESG principles in order to deliver an outstanding banking experience that meets its customers' needs and fulfills their aspirations.



## US inflation data may not alter Fed plans to hold rates steady

**WASHINGTON:** Fresh US consumer inflation data published Wednesday is unlikely to sway the Federal Reserve, which is widely expected to leave its key lending rate unchanged and lower the number of cuts it has penciled in for this year.

The May headline consumer inflation rate is expected to be little changed from a month earlier, according to the median forecast of economists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. If the analysts are correct, inflation will remain stuck firmly above the Fed's long-term target of two percent, giving the US central bank an additional incentive to hold rates at a 23-year high of between 5.25 and 5.50 percent, and wait for the economic winds to change.

"We expect guidance from the Fed to signal a prolonged pause as the bar for hikes or several cuts remains high," Bank of America economists wrote in a recent investor note.

The US Fed has a dual mandate from Congress to tackle both inflation and unemployment, and the data suggests it remains broadly on track to tackle both without pushing the US into recession—despite the small uptick in headline inflation in the first few months of this year. With cuts almost certainly off the agenda for this meeting, Wednesday's action is likely to center around the economic forecasts from the 19 members of the Fed's rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), which will be updated for the first time since March.

Analysts are looking to FOMC members to lower their individual forecasts for where rates will be at the end of the year in a chart known as the "dot plot," which reduces the median number of projected cuts this year from three down to two or fewer. "We continue to expect the first rate cut in September," Goldman Sachs chief economist David Mericle wrote in a note to clients published on Sunday.

His team at Goldman sees the Fed moving to ease monetary policy every quarter after that, meaning a total of two 0.25-percentage-point cuts in 2024, and four in 2025. "It only takes one dot moving higher to shift the median up to two 25bp (basis point) cuts—which is our base case," economists at Citi wrote in a recent investor note. — AFP

## China consumer prices up in May, deflation persists

**BEIJING:** Consumer prices in China rose slightly last month, data showed Wednesday, though analysts warned more work was needed to boost demand as leaders struggle to reignite growth in the world's number two economy.

The consumer price index rose 0.3 percent on-year in May, unchanged from the increase recorded in April and the fourth straight month in positive territory, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

However, the figure was off the 0.4 percent forecast by a Bloomberg survey of analysts.

Factory gate prices, meanwhile, continued to fall, extending a deflationary run that has persisted since late 2022. The producer price index (PPI) dropped 1.4 percent on-year last month, though that was an improvement on the 2.5 percent plunge suffered in April and slightly better than Bloomberg forecasts.

Chinese leaders have been seeking to boost consumer spending as economic headwinds such as mounting property sector debt and youth unemployment continue to drag on growth. "The improvement in PPI is largely driven by commodity prices such as copper and gold, which is not a reflection of China's domestic demand," Zhiwei Zhang, president and chief economist of Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note. Recent decisions by authorities aimed at easing pressure on the real estate sector are a "step in the right direction", Zhang said, adding that "property sales in recent weeks have not rebounded". "A more comprehensive and proactive policy stance covering (the) fiscal, monetary, and property sector may be necessary to boost domestic demand more effectively." — AFP

## ECB diverges from Fed on rates, sparking jitters

**BERLIN:** In a rare move, the European Central Bank last week beat the US Federal Reserve to the monetary policy easing punch when it cut interest rates for the first time in nearly five years. AFP looks at why it was the first to act and whether the divergence holds any risks.

Why did the ECB move ahead of the Fed? The central bank for the 20 countries that use the euro cut its key deposit rate from a record four percent to 3.75 percent, citing progress on fighting inflation that has fallen sharply and is heading towards its two-percent target.

Canada's central bank also cut its benchmark rate last week, while policymakers in Sweden and Switzerland recently started easing policy. But the Fed, which publishes its latest rate decision on Wednesday, still faces stubborn inflation and a robust labor market, which have pushed back expectations for when it will begin to reduce borrowing costs. US policymakers are expected to keep rates unchanged at a 23-year high, with analysts predicting they will not start cutting before September at the earliest.

Will monetary policy diverge even further? ECB president Christine Lagarde said in an interview with European media this week that the two central banks had to act "on the basis of our respective mandates, and we have different fundamentals at the moment".

But the differences in rate paths could end up being less extreme than anticipated even just a few months ago—eurozone economic data has been coming in stronger than expected, tempering expectations of how fast the ECB will move. After cutting last week, Lagarde struck a cautious tone, saying it was hard to predict the path ahead and it would likely be "bumpy".

Analysts are now betting a cut once a quarter—so at every other meeting of the ECB, which makes its rate calls every six weeks—but also noted that the ECB could go slower, depending on the data.

What consequences for the euro? If US interest rates remain higher it will likely boost bond yields, particularly on 10-year Treasury bonds, and make the dollar more attractive to the detriment of other currencies. After the ECB's rate cut last Thursday, the euro fell to around \$1.07 after trading for weeks at around \$1.09.

If the Fed holds rates steady Wednesday, it would be "logical for the euro to weaken against the dollar", said LBBW bank analyst Jens-Oliver Niklasch.

But analysts say the impact would be limited as most traders had already anticipated the divergence. "Since February at least, the markets have taken this paradigm shift on board," said independent markets analyst Andreas Lipkow.

### And for the economy?

Even if limited, the fall in the value of a currency can help economies by lowering the price of goods exported to countries that use different currencies to pay for them. That could be welcome in export-oriented Germany, as Europe's biggest economy has struggled in recent times with high energy costs and



ECB president Christine Lagarde

weakness in trading partners battering its crucial manufacturers.

"Particularly in these difficult economic times, a euro that is weaker than the dollar could give exporters a boost," said Volker Treier, an economist with the national association for the German chambers of commerce (DIHK). But a weaker euro could increase the cost of imports, particularly those denominated in dollars, and increase inflation in the eurozone—though the ECB has downplayed such concerns. "More and more global firms who want to sell to the (euro) area, they set their prices in euros," ECB chief economist Philip Lane said in Dublin on Tuesday.

The exchange rate between the euro and dollar remains "incredibly stable", and recent fluctuations would be of interest to currency market specialists but "invisible" when it comes to calculating inflation, Lane said. — AFP

## ChatGPT a mentor for Japan's 89-yr-old app developer

**TOKYO:** Japanese 89-year-old Tomiji Suzuki started coding in retirement and is now making apps for the fast-growing elderly demographic, using ChatGPT to fine-tune his skills. So far Suzuki has developed 11 free iPhone apps to help Japan's ageing population, including his latest: a slideshow of items to remember when leaving the house, from a wallet and hearing aids to patient registration cards.

He was inspired to create the app, which features his granddaughter's voice, after he realised he had forgotten his dentures as he was about to board a bullet train.

"These kinds of things happen to the elderly," he laughed, telling AFP that his age has been an advantage when coming up with ideas for the programs. "No matter how hard they try, I don't think younger people understand the elderly's needs and expectations," he said.

Nearly a third of Japan's population is aged 65 and above, making it the world's oldest country after tiny Monaco, and one in 10 people are octogenarians. As in other developed economies, the plummeting birth rate has raised fears of a looming demographic crisis with not enough workers to support the growing ranks of retired. Suzuki used to work at a trading house but developed an interest in computing in later life, taking a programming course in the early 2010s. "I like creating things," he said.

"When I discovered I could develop apps myself—and if I do, Apple will market them worldwide, just like that—it felt like a great idea." To help him make the app "Outing Prep Voice Slide Show", released in April, Suzuki asked around 1,000 coding-related questions to ChatGPT. He described the generative AI chatbot as a "great teacher" and has even published a book about using it as a programming mentor. — AFP



TOKYO: This picture taken on Feb 25, 2024 shows app developer Tomiji Suzuki (center) attending a workshop in Tokyo. — AFP



BERLIN: A cement container is lowered into a construction site during work on a 17,000 m3 underground rainwater overflow basin for the Berliner Wasserbetriebe (Berlin waterworks), in Berlin's Mitte district on May 17, 2024. — AFP

## From swamp to sponge: Berlin harnesses rain in climate shift

**BERLIN:** In two years' time, a massive hole in the heart of Berlin will become the German capital's biggest reservoir, capturing an increasingly precious resource—water. Once a swamp centuries ago, Berlin has gone from a city trying to keep its abundant groundwater from overflowing to one scrambling to keep its forests green.

"Before, the aim was to evacuate rainwater to be able to cross the city without having to put on rubber boots," Stephan Natz, the spokesman for Berlin's water management services, told AFP from the edge of the crater, 20 meters (66 feet) deep. But in 2018, the city adopted a "paradigm change" and is now finding ways to store rainwater to both combat drought and prevent flash floods.

In essence, it is applying the sponge city concept, which emerged as a theory in the 1970s and which has found favor in growing urban centers across the United States, China and Europe, as climate change makes weather systems more mercurial and more intense. "The distribution of rain is now more erratic, that is to say, droughts are followed by strong rains and an ever-growing warming, which is in turn increasing evaporation," said Natz. Berlin's 150-year-old sewage drainage system was not built to cope with today's heavy deluges. "In case of heavy rain, the waters are mixing and flooding the Spree river,

sparkling the deaths of fish and pollution that is visible," said Natz. At the same time, Berlin has faced severe water shortages in recent years as drier conditions in the capital leave the ground too dry to absorb sudden and strong rainfall.

As a result, the capital's groundwater has still not returned to its normal level after five years of drought, according to the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries.

"There is now a realization of the value of water in Berlin. It's one of the driest places in Germany," said Darla Nickel, the director of the agency that manages rainwater in the capital.

In a symbol of the ongoing transformation, the giant water reserve under construction is smack in the middle of the capital—fewer than two kilometers (1.2 miles) away from the Brandenburg Gate.

The reservoir, 40 meters in diameter, will collect almost 17,000 cubic meters of water—or five times the capacity of an Olympic-size pool. It will store the rainwater before sending it to a treatment plant.

Besides the mega reservoir, Berlin is now requiring new housing projects to have a rainwater collection strategy. Quartier 52, built five years ago in the southwest of the city, offers a model.

Three large ponds have been dug around the housing estate, offering residents a scenic walk on sunny days while serving as catchment when it rains.

Rainwater is "collected on green roofs and then in these ponds," said Nickel. "The water evaporates and in turn creates a more agreeable atmosphere." The pavements are also gently sloping, allowing water to run down into the ground. "You see that it can be really simple," said Nickel. — AFP

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2024

## France mourns loss of 1960s icon Françoise Hardy

French singer Françoise Hardy, whose crystalline voice and melancholy lyrics shot her to international stardom in the 1960s, has died at the age of 80, according to her son. Thomas Dutronc, Hardy's son with another French music star, Jacques Dutronc, announced her death on Tuesday. "Mom is gone," he wrote on Instagram on Tuesday alongside a baby picture of himself with his mother.

Hardy became a pop icon and fashion muse of the 1960s and beyond. Mick Jagger described her as his "ideal woman", Bob Dylan wrote a poem for her, and women around the world imitated her androgynous style and embraced her melancholic melodies. But Hardy was a reluctant superstar, who dreamed of domestic bliss even as she chalked up chart hits.

It all began in 1962 with the catchy debut single "Tous les garçons et les filles" (All the girls and boys), in which the shy singer-songwriter lamented her loveless status. "All the boys and girls my age walk hand in hand in the streets two by two... but not me, I walk alone through the streets, my heart aching," she sang wistfully.

The single sold a million copies, making Hardy an instant star of the



French singer Françoise Hardy poses at her home in Calvi on August 12, 1977. — AFP

"Ye-Ye" (after the Beatles "yeah, yeah, yeah") generation of post-war French pop singers. Soon a parallel career as a cover girl beckoned, with the singer's thick fringe, sculpted cheekbones and bohemian style coming to define a sort of effortless French chic.

She was an early adopter of the mini-skirt and became a model for fashion designers including Yves Saint Laurent and Paco Rabanne. More hits followed, from the ballad "Mon Amie La Rose" to

"Comment te dire adieu", about the pain of separation from a man with a "heart of pyrex", with lyrics provided by the bad-boy of French pop, Serge Gainsbourg.

Bob Dylan was among those bowled over by the singer's languid vocals. On the cover of his "Another Side" album in 1964, he wrote a poem starting: "For Françoise Hardy/At the Seine's edge/A giant shadow/Of Notre-Dame". But Hardy had eyes only for fellow "Ye-Ye" star, the suave and sardonic Dutronc.

The pair married and had a son Thomas, who also became a musician. But Dutronc, an inveterate womanizer, was an elusive figure, who jealously guarded his independence. "From the moment we met, Jacques created distance between us," Hardy told Liberation newspaper in an interview. The pair, who separated in the late 1980s, were a study in contrasts.

Dutronc, whose hits included "Il est cinq heures, Paris s'éveille" and "J'aime les filles" was a natural performer, but Hardy, who was studying German at university when she shot to fame, appeared ill at ease on stage. "Singing is not something that comes easily to me," Hardy, who thought of herself as a melody-maker first and foremost, told the French-German Arte channel in a documentary. Dutronc penned one of her hits, "Le Temps de l'Amour" (1962), which director Wes Anderson revived for a new generation in his 2012 movie "Moonrise Kingdom".

### Greatest singers list

Hardy was born in Nazi-occupied Paris in 1944 to a single mother, who was separated from the father of her two daughters. Her grandmother told her she was "hideous" and would nev-

er find a match. It was only when, years later, Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger declared that he had a crush on her that she realized that she was not the "young, naive unattractive girl" she had been led to believe.

Before Dutronc, she was in a relationship with photographer Jean-Marie Perier. In 2004, she was diagnosed with lymphoma, and in 2019 revealed she had throat cancer and had received 45 rounds of radiotherapy.

In a radio interview in 2021, Hardy, who had lost hearing in one ear, backed a bill on euthanasia: "At a certain point, when there is far too much pain and no hope, you have to end the suffering," she said.

Hardy was the only French artist to appear in a 2023 ranking of the 200 greatest singers of all time published by Rolling Stone magazine. At the time, the publication said her cover of Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne" might be "the most evocative ever recorded, his included". In addition to her native French, Hardy also sang in English, Italian and German. Her career spanned more than 50 years and almost 30 studio albums. — AFP

## BTS star Jin finishes South Korean military service

K-pop megastar Jin from BTS ended more than 500 days of South Korean military service on Wednesday, crying tears of joy, with bandmates embracing him and one belting out a group hit on the saxophone to celebrate. The seven members of the world's most popular boy band have been on a self-described "hiatus" since 2022 due to their military service, which South Korea requires of all men under 30 due to tensions with the nuclear-armed North.

Jin, the oldest in the group and the first to enlist, emerged from the gates of his army base in South Korea's northern Yeoncheon county early Wednesday, where he was met by bandmates J-hope, V, RM, Jungkook and Jimin.

The K-pop stars, who have reportedly taken leave from duties to mark the day, presented a beaming Jin, still in his military uniform, with a giant bouquet of flowers, as they all hugged while RM played the saxophone, blasting out the hook of BTS's mega-hit "Dynamite".

Fans had hung colourful banners outside the base, with one reading: "Seok-jin you did so well for the last 548 days. We'll stand by you with our unwavering love," referring to the singer by his full first name.

A giant balloon flew in front with the message: "Worldwide handsome Seok-jin! Congratulations on your discharge." Yeoncheon county put up its own banner that read: "BTS Jin, The last year and a



K-pop boy band BTS member Jin salutes after being discharged from his mandatory military service in front of a military base in Yeoncheon on June 12, 2024. — AFP

half was a joy for us. Yeoncheon will not forget you!" Fans had been urged not to show up, and there were only a couple of admirers present early Wednesday outside the base. "Although my hands were shaking and my muscles stiffened, I was so happy to see him," said Natose Sunagawa, a 19-year-old from Tokyo.

Holding a plush doll of Jin, and with a keyring of Jin's face on her purse, she said she came because she "wanted to meet him so bad". "As all BTS members haven't finished their military service, I believe Jin will release solo materials. I wish to buy his solo albums and go to the concerts," said Sunagawa, wiping away her tears.

### 'Huggathon'

BTS' official account on X posted a picture of the entire group celebrating Jin's discharge with a cake. "I'm normally more handsome than this, but I cried when I was discharged. My eyes are puffy. I usually have confidence in my face, but I'm less confident today," said Jin in a livestream on Weverse, a superfan social media platform. Showing off his certificates and commendations, Jin mentioned that he "did well" during his service and cried twice because he was so happy to be home.

His release comes just ahead of the 11th anniversary of the group's debut, with their agency HYBE's office in Seoul

plus some local cafes decked out in purple decorations to mark the occasion.

Jin will participate in a "huggathon" on Thursday, where he will hug 1,000 fans who won a raffle held on Weverse, before giving his first performance in two years. Jin said on Weverse that the "huggathon" was his idea, and that he had "initially wanted to hug 3000 fans" but had to agree to a smaller number after HYBE cited safety concerns.

"It is significant that Jin did his military service without any problem, since for a K-pop male idol serving in the military is the biggest issue" for their career, said Yoo Sung-man, an analyst at Leading Investment and Securities. "Jin's discharge is a positive sign for entertainment stock prices," he added.

HYBE stock price has been hit by a dispute with superproducer Min Hee-jin, the mastermind behind girlband NewJeans. "Once Jin resumes his solo performances it will definitely lead to an increase (in stock price)," Yoo told AFP.

HYBE's share price was up two percent in early trading Wednesday. "BTS accounts for a large proportion of profit in HYBE, it is very encouraging that the discharge of BTS members has begun," said Yoo. The next BTS member to finish will be J-hope, who will be discharged in October. The rest of the band will complete their service in June 2025. — AFP



Celine Dion speaks onstage during the 66th GRAMMY Awards at Crypto.com Arena on February 4, 2024 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

## Dion resolves to perform again, 'even if I have to crawl'

Celine Dion is determined to return to singing onstage despite suffering from a rare neurological condition - "even if I have to crawl," she said in a candid new interview. In the sit-down with US network NBC, which will be released in full later Tuesday, Dion said that although she has been suffering from Stiff Person Syndrome - which causes stiff muscles in the torso, arms and legs, and can trigger severe spasms - she will do everything in her power to perform again. "I'm going to go back onstage, even if I have to crawl. Even if I have to talk with my hands, I will. I will," Dion, 56, said.

The interview came out ahead of the release of her documentary "I Am: Celine Dion," which is set for release June 25 on Amazon Prime. "I am Celine Dion, because today my voice will be heard for the first time, not just because I have to, or because I need to. It's because I want to and I miss it," said the Grammy-winning singer behind hits including "My Heart Will Go On."

Dion first disclosed in December 2022 that she had been diagnosed with Stiff Person Syndrome, an autoimmune disorder. There is no cure for Stiff Person Syndrome, which is progressive, but treatment can help control symptoms. According to the US National Institutes of Health, the condition affects twice as many women as men.

"It's like somebody is strangling you," she said, saying the pain can course through her entire body, and that the spasms have at times caused broken ribs. Dion was forced to cancel a string of shows scheduled for 2023 and 2024, saying she was not strong enough to tour.

She made a surprise appearance earlier this year at the Grammy Awards, presenting the Album of the Year award to Taylor Swift. Dion has sold more than 250 million albums during her decades-long career. The Quebec-born star's "Courage World Tour" began in 2019, and Dion had completed 52 shows before the Covid-19 pandemic put the remainder on hold. — AFP



Firefighters intercept Polish climber Marcin Banot (2nd-R) as he climbed a building in Puerto Madero wearing an Argentina national football team jersey with Lionel Messi's number 10 in Buenos Aires on June 11, 2024. — AFP

## Polish 'Spider-Man' arrested in Buenos Aires

A Polish daredevil was arrested in Buenos Aires Tuesday as he tried to scale a 30-storey building without ropes, only to be removed by firefighters. Marcin Banot, dressed in an Argentine football jersey, was intercepted after climbing 25 floors of the Globant building as onlookers gathered below.

More than 30 firefighters, ambulances and police cars were rushed to the scene after someone inside the building called an emergen-

cy line. He did not resist efforts to remove him. Back on the ground, Banot was arrested, and risks being ordered to pay the costs for the rescue operation, officials said.

The 36-year-old has pulled similar stunts in other countries and has hundreds of thousands of followers on social networks. He had already tried to climb the same building last week, but was prevented by police. — AFP

## New York hot dog champ out of contest over plant-based brand deal

Competitive eating legend Joey Chestnut is as much a part of July 4th celebrations in New York as the city's massive annual fireworks display, wolfing down dozens of hot dogs each year in the contest sponsored by fast food company Nathan's.

But his long reign as the King of Coney Island has come to an acrimonious end: Chestnut will not compete in the 2024 event after reaching a deal with plant-based company Impossible Foods, a direct competitor to Nathan's.

"We are devastated to learn that Joey Chestnut has chosen to represent a rival brand... rather than competing in the 2024 Nathan's Famous Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Contest," Major League Eating, which organizes the event, said in a statement.

"It seems that Joey and his managers have prioritized a new partnership with a different hot dog brand over our long-time relationship," it said, while nevertheless calling Chestnut an "American hero." Chestnut, 40, is the top-ranked competitive eater in the world, according to Major League Eating. He has won the Nathan's contest on July 4 - which draws thousands of fans each year - a total of 16 times, including in 2021, when he set a world record by eating 76 hot dogs and buns in 10 minutes.

He holds dozens of world records in eating everything from asparagus to gyoza, according to the Major League



Joey Chestnut eats as he competes for his 15th championship title during the 2022 Nathan's Famous Fourth of July hot dog eating contest on Coney Island on July 4, 2022 in New York. — AFP

Eating website. Chestnut said on social media that he was "gutted" about the decision by Nathan's not to allow him to compete, and suggested organizers were "looking to change the rules from past years as it relates to other partners I can work with."

"I love competing in that event, I love celebrating America with my fans all over this great country on the 4th and I have been training to defend my title," Chestnut said on X, formerly Twitter, and Instagram. "To my fans, I love you and appreciate you. Rest assured that you'll see me eat again soon!! STAY HUNGRY!" — AFP

## Lifestyle



Volunteers prepare eelgrass shoots for replanting, on the shores of Vejle Fjord.



Volunteers gather around buckets of eelgrass shoots on the shores of Vejle Fjord, on June 9, 2024.



An underwater photograph shows a volunteer diver planting an eelgrass at Vejle Fjord.



Volunteers gather around buckets of eelgrass shoots on the shores of Vejle Fjord.

## UNDERWATER GARDENERS PLANT EELGRASS TO SAVE 'DEAD' DANISH FJORD

Under a white tent on the shores of a polluted Danish fjord, volunteers and researchers prepare slender green shoots of eelgrass to be planted on the seabed to help restore the site's damaged ecosystem. Denmark generally has a strong track record on environmental issues, but only five of its 109 coastal zones are considered healthy, according to the Danish Environmental Agency.

Like other coastal areas in Denmark, the Vejle fjord is suffering from eutrophication—a process in which nutrients, often from land run-off, accumulate in a body of water and lead to increased growth of microorganisms and algae. The algae cover water surfaces, blocking light and cutting off oxygen, killing plants and wildlife. An underwater surveillance camera installed in the Vejle fjord by the municipality last year detected just one fish in 70 hours.

### 'Completely collapsed'

In Denmark, a major pork producer, more than 60 percent of the country's land is used for agriculture—one of the highest concentrations in the world—sparking frequent warnings in recent years about the risk of run-off. A 2022 report by the University of Southern Denmark (USD) concluded the 22-kilometre (14-mile) Vejle fjord was in "poor



On the shores of a polluted Danish fjord, volunteers and researchers prepare eelgrass shoots to be transplanted.

environmental condition" because of high levels of nitrogen run-off from fertilizer use on farms. And when the mercury rises, so does the problem.

"We had a very warm summer in 2023, and that resulted in a huge oxygen depletion," a biologist who works for Vejle municipality, Mads Fjeldsoe Christensen, told AFP. "That was quite severe. We witnessed a lot of dead fish." He noted that excess nutrients had been emitted into the fjord for "the last 30, maybe 40 years." "For a long time, the fjord has been able to recover. But for the last maybe three, four

years, we have witnessed a fjord that has completely collapsed."

Scientists and the municipality decided in 2018 to reintroduce the slender green eelgrass in the busy inlet in the hopes of restoring its once lush seabed, and the wildlife that thrived among them. In Vejle, some 50 volunteers turned out on a recent weekend to help the scientists. Braving gloomy, blustery weather, they crowded around tables with buckets full of eelgrass shoots that scientists had picked from zones where it is thriving.

The volunteers rolled the individual shoots around biodegradable nails, which divers then took and transplanted into the seabed. "Eelgrass is where all the fish grow up, so they're like kindergarten for fish life," Fjeldsoe Christensen said. "If you do not have eelgrass, there's simply no space for the fish population to grow up."

### Vejle fjord 'funeral'

Six hectares of seabed and more than 100,000 eelgrass shoots have been planted on the seabed since the transplants began in 2020. In some places, divers have observed a return of aquatic life, such as crabs and fish. "We do see effects of the nature restoration," said SDU biologist Timi Banke, who is taking part in the project.



The shore of Vejle Fjord is seen on June 9, 2024. — AFP photos

In April, Greenpeace organized an open-air "funeral" for the Vejle fjord to draw attention to the dire state of Danish coastal waters. "It is in bad condition and that's why we're doing something, but it's not dead," Banke told AFP, hailing the efforts undertaken by environmentalists and locals.

On World Oceans Day on June 8, the Danish think-tank Ocean Institute organized eelgrass transplant opera-

tions at 32 sites across the country. "By planting eelgrass, we are putting the emphasis on restoring nature, but that doesn't mean we should forget that we also have to reduce the emission of nutrients in Danish waters under pressure," the think tank's director Liselotte Hohwy Stokholm wrote on the organization's website. —AFP



A tourist poses for photograph with Mount Fuji in front of a convenience store in the town of Fujikawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture.—AFP

## Near-finished Japan condo blocking Mount Fuji to be razed

A Japanese property developer has decided to demolish a near-complete, 10-storey condominium in Tokyo after pushback from neighbors who said it blocked a view of Mount Fuji. The company Sekisui House said in a statement late Tuesday it had "voluntarily decided to discontinue the project". "There is no denying that the current situation has an enormous impact on the landscape. We have decided to prioritize the view from the road," it said.

The recently built apartments are in part of western Tokyo famous for its picturesque views of Japan's highest mountain, which appears to soar into the sky from the end of the road named Fujimi or "Fuji Viewing" street. But the tall new block spoils this effect because it obstructs half of the majestic active volcano. Construction went ahead despite protests by residents proud of the street's scenery, and tenants had been due to move into the condo in Tokyo's Kunitachi district next month.

Then—in a shock move—developer Sekisui House recently put up a

notice saying the complex would be demolished. There was nothing illegal about the construction process, Sekisui House said Tuesday, but "our consideration of long-distance views of Mount Fuji has been insufficient". For some residents, the decision was welcome news. "We didn't want to lose the appeal of our town, where on a sunny day you have a clear view of Mount Fuji," one local told broadcaster TBS.

The debacle is not the only recent flashpoint around views of Mount Fuji, which is covered in snow most of the year but attracts hundreds of thousands of climbers in the summer. More casual and sometimes ill-mannered tourists are also flocking to surrounding areas to snap Instagram-perfect pictures of the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) peak—testing the patience of locals. An exasperated Japanese town took the rare step last month of deliberately blocking a view of Mount Fuji with a large black barrier in a bid to deter photo-hungry tourists. —AFP

## 'Magical sight': Mass insect migration in European mountain pass

Scientist Will Hawkes said the first sign he was about to witness one of nature's great migrations was being enveloped by a "blizzard of butterflies, cabbage whites and clouded yellows, like a storm of petals". Then, standing on a mountain pass on the border of France and Spain during a hot day in September, he heard a "purposeful hum". When he looked down, there were so many insects moving around his feet that it looked "like a living carpet," Hawkes told AFP.

Proceedings of the Royal Society B. "It was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen," said Hawkes, an insect migration researcher at the UK's University of Exeter. The British team of researchers was inspired by ornithologists Elizabeth and David Lack, who first recorded the phenomenon in 1950, and described the insects as "the most remarkable migrants of all". The team has visited the mountain pass every autumn since 2018, setting up a video camera and traps to count and identify the insects.

This handout picture taken by Dr Will Hawkes shows a *Episyrphus balteatus* marmalade hoverfly lays on a flower. — AFP

More than 17 million insects migrate through the 30-metre (100 foot) Pass of Bujaruelo in the Pyrenees mountain range every year, according to a study led by Hawkes published on Wednesday. The migration was first recorded more than 70 years ago, but the new research is the first to estimate the number and types of insects buzzing through the gap.

At its peak, there were more than 3,000 insects per meter every minute, according to the study in the journal

### Pollinators and pest controllers

Butterflies, dragonflies, house flies and other insects were detected migrating south from mainland Europe during autumn. But most -- 90 percent—were marmalade hoverflies, the researchers found. These "gorgeous" orange and black-striped hoverflies eat aphids, so are great for ridding crops or gardens of the pests, Hawkes said.

Because they traverse hundreds of kilometers, they might even be better pollinators than bees, he added. But the insect migration may have been far greater in the past. Marmalade hoverfly numbers are believed to have declined due to climate change, pesticides and habitat loss. Hawkes pointed to a 2020 German study which found that the number of aphid-eating hoverflies—such as marmalade hoverflies—had declined by 97 percent. But he emphasized that anyone can still go and see this "amazing insect migration event".

The pass is easiest to reach from the French mountain town of Gavarnie. People can drive close to the pass, and it is a few hours walk from there. Hawkes recommended a sunny day in September or October—particularly if the wind is blowing from the south. "It's just the most magical sight."—AFP



This photograph taken on April 23, 2024, shows a view of The Crosby-Schoyen Codex, a Manuscript Masterpiece from The Schoyen Collection at the Christie's auction house in Paris, and that will be sold on auction in London.—AFP

## Oldest privately owned book sells for £3 million at UK sale

The world's oldest book in a private collection, and one of the earliest books in existence, sold at auction in London on Tuesday for more than £3 million. The Crosby-Schoyen Codex was previously owned by the Norwegian businessman and rare book collector Martin Schoyen, and contains the earliest complete copies of two texts from the Bible -- the book of Jonah and Peter's first epistle.

Bidding for the text at Christie's auction house started at £1.7 million for a mix of enthusiastic online and in-person bidders. It sold for £3,065,000 (\$3,898,000) including taxes to an anonymous phone bidder. The codex was discovered by Egyptian farmers in the 1950s.

It was originally copied by a monk in what is now Egypt around the fourth century AD, making it at least 1,600 years old and far older than more renowned ancient texts such as the Gutenberg Bible, which dates from the 1450s. Written in Coptic script on double-sided papyrus leaves now preserved between plexiglass plates, the ancient biblical text represents advances in written technology at a time when single-sided scrolls were more commonplace. Twelve additional select pieces from the Schoyen Collection also went up for auction alongside the literary jewel.—AFP



A woman pours dyeing powder into a container ready for mixing at the Adire Kampala dyeing in Abeokuta.



Folded Adire fabric are placed in a bucket where it is dyed at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit in Abeokuta.



A woman walks past shirts made with Adire fabric at Adire Mall in Abeokuta.



# Nigeria's dyed cloth traders feel heat from China, inflation



A woman dyes Adire fabric at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit in Abeokuta.



A woman packs Adire fabric into a plastic bag at her shop in Abeokuta.



A woman presents her hands while wearing gloves that she uses to dye Adire fabrics at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit in Abeokuta.



Clothes made with Adire fabrics for sale are displayed at Adire Mall in Abeokuta.



Woman spread Adire fabric to dry under the sun after dyeing at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit in Abeokuta. — AFP photos

Despite the rain pelting Balogun market in Lagos, Ajoke takes her time choosing the tie-dye fabric known as adire that she wants to give as a gift. The popular textile traditionally dyed with indigo is emblematic of the culture of the Yoruba people, one of Nigeria's majority ethnic groups. The cloth is typically used for traditional outfits often worn by Nigerians for special occasions, weddings and parties.

The 21-year-old customer slides her fingers over different brightly colored fabrics to distinguish traditional Nigerian cotton from polyester versions made in China. "It's not expensive," Ajoke remarked, picking up a Chinese-made fabric with purple patterns. It costs 3,300 naira (around \$2.20), half the price of a locally produced fabric. As Africa's most populous nation grapples with high inflation that has left many struggling, Chinese counterfeit adire products have become an attractive option. But the imported textiles are challenging the long-established clothing industry in Nigeria, producers and traders say.

The southwestern city of Abeokuta -- nicknamed the Capital of Adire -- is home to nearly 2,000 merchants and producers, according to government data. Somodale Akomo Amosa, 86, president of the city's sprawling adire market, said she had watched helplessly as Chinese competition began about 10 years ago. "Her income has decreased over the years. She has only sold five fabrics in 10 days," one of Amosa's daughters said.

### Competition and crisis

Adire fabric is produced using the tie-dye technique. Fabrics are knotted and folded by hand before being dyed to create color gradients and shapes, said Tunde M Akinwumi, a retired professor of African textile design and author of a book on adire. Despite the difficulties, market chief Amosa rejects the idea of Nigerian adire producers using machines to help cut the costs of making their fabrics, as the Chinese do.

The process "would harm the tradition and originality of the products", said Amosa, one of the few adire traders who does not offer the cheaper products among their wares. As well as competition from China, she blames the economic climate at home for preventing people from being able to buy the traditional cloth. Nigeria is gripped by its worst cost-of-living crisis in years after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu intro-

duced tough economic reforms when he came to power a year ago. Ending a fuel subsidy and floating the currency are expected to reap benefits in the long term but the moves have hiked fuel and living costs and sharply devalued the naira.

ket, the main adire production centre in Abeokuta also feels the impact. The number of visitors ordering directly from the centre is falling, a 55-year-old producer said. "Before, lots of people came here to order dresses for weddings or

feet Chinese adire. So far, no action has been taken. In 2020, the national and state government in Ogun where Abeokuta is located launched a website to allow merchants to sell their "original and top-of-the-class" adire throughout the



A man carrying imported Adire fabric from China walks past a shop at the Adire Mall in Abeokuta.



A woman folds Adire fabric before dyeing it at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit.



Somodale Akomo Amosa (right), 87, arranges Adire fabrics with her daughter in her shop in Abeokuta.



A general view of Adire fabrics spread on the floor after dyeing drying in the sun at Kenta Itoku Abeokuta dye pit.

Some fabric traders like Christiana Morenikeji Ilesanmi feel they have no choice. "You are selling more Chinese-made adire, because it's cheaper. We feel bad," said the 56-year-old, who buys from wholesalers in the megalopolis, Lagos. "Everybody is buying it."

### Saving a 'craft'

A few minutes' walk from the mar-

special occasions, but it's not like that now," she said. To help the industry, Nigeria's presidency announced in March that it would allocate 400 traders with some 200 store spaces at reduced rates in Abeokuta's vast adire market, under a national business aid project.

Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's two-time former head of state, urged authorities last year to stop imports of counter-

country as well as abroad. For market president Amosa, keeping adire alive is a matter of pride and tradition. "Adire production is a family inheritance to us, others have come to learn it from us," she said. — AFP



A woman packs Adire fabrics after drying them in the sun at the Adire Kampala dyeing pit in Abeokuta.



Clothes for sale made with Adire fabric are displayed at the Adire Mall in Abeokuta.

## Sports

# Zampa milestone as Australia march into T20 World Cup Super Eights

## NZ hold 'honest conversations' ahead of must-win T20 World Cup clash

**NORTH SOUND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA:** Australia marched into the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup with a nine-wicket demolition of Namibia at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Tuesday.

Adam Zampa led the rout of an outclassed Namibian man to reach 100 T20 wickets.

The southern Africans were bundled out for just 72 off 17 overs after batting first. With victories under their belt over Oman and arch-rivals England, Australia then sped to the target in just 5.4 overs for the loss of one wicket. Travis Head finished unbeaten on 34 and captain Mitchell Marsh struck the winning boundary to be 18 not out.

Put in to bat in breezy, drizzly conditions, Namibia were first strangled by the 2021 champions' efficiency with their new-ball bowlers and some safe catching. Zampa then took over, the leg-spinner ripping through the lower half of Namibia's demoralised batting line-up.

His fourth wicket came off the last ball of his four-over spell when he bowled Bernard Scholtz to reach his milestone of 100 wickets in the shortest format. "I bowled a couple of pies (bad balls) tonight to get a couple wickets but that happens at times," said Zampa after receiving the Man of the Match award.

"I've been feeling really good and encouraged by the captain to take wickets through those middle overs. It is a bit of a challenge here in the Caribbean but it's something you have to cope with for sure. "This is the first step in trying to take the trophy home, but there is a long way to go," he added.

### England in danger

Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus, who needed 17 deliveries to get off the mark, top-scored with 36

off 43 balls (four fours, one six) before being ninth out, the second wicket for Marcus Stoinis. Stoinis shared the new ball with Josh Hazlewood, the senior seamer also picking up two wickets.

"You cannot sit back against the best in the world. The gap in skill is there but you can sort of close that by fighting fire with fire," said Erasmus in the aftermath of the chastening loss. "We did not do that tonight. A good side like Australia will expose you if you are not willing to mentally step up to this level on a particular day."

The comprehensive win throws an interesting light over Australia's final group match. They face Scotland, who are currently second in the group and poised to eliminate title-holders England if they beat the rampant Aussies on Saturday in St Lucia.

"It's going to get pretty busy after our match against Scotland so we'll manage as many people as we can over the next few days," said Marsh, hinting at the possibility of resting a couple of players.

The captain was full of praise for his premier spinner Zampa. "If you look at his career over the last four or five years, he's probably our most important player," said Marsh. "He loves the big moment, loves the pressure. I think that all comes with experience and he's bowling beautifully at the moment."

Earlier, Coach Gary Stead said his New Zealand team have held "honest conversations" ahead of a do-or-die clash against the West Indies at the Twenty20 World Cup. A stunning loss to Afghanistan in their opening game means the beaten 2021 finalists must win their remaining three pool matches to advance. That starts with co-hosts the West Indies at the Brian Lara Stadium in Trinidad on Wednesday local time. "This is essentially like a knockout game. We have got to give it everything we can," Stead told



**NORTH SOUND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA:** Australia's Adam Zampa (R) celebrates the dismissal of Namibia's Zane Green during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group B cricket match between Australia and Namibia at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

New Zealand media on a video call. "We have to win three games. We have to win them well."

New Zealand were well beaten by Afghanistan, by 84 runs, for their first defeat to the Afghans in T20 cricket. Stead said he may tinker with his line-up, but will resist making vast changes.

"I think one of the dangers is if you chop and change too much, then it looks like you are panicking a wee bit," he said. "We had some pretty honest conversations around the performance. It's a new game. The danger is you take what happened in the last game and bring it into this one." — AFP

## SA into T20 Super Eights after Nepal, S Lanka rained out

**LAUDERHILL:** Heavy rain and a waterlogged outfield led to the abandonment of the T20 World Cup match between Sri Lanka and Nepal on Tuesday in Florida.

The result meant that Group D leaders South Africa, who have won all three of their games, become the first team to qualify for the Super Eight stage of the tournament. Rain had poured down for most of the day, with flood warnings in place around the region, but a break in the weather led ground staff to begin the task of trying to dry the field.

However, to the disappointment of the large and lively contingent of Nepalese fans in the Central Broward Stadium, after an hour of working on removing the standing water, officials called the game off, leaving the teams to share the points. Sri Lanka, having lost their opening two games against South Africa and Bangladesh, are now on the brink of mathematical elimination from the competition.

Nepal lost their opening game to the Netherlands. South Africa lead Group D with a perfect six points in three matches, while Bangladesh and the Netherlands have two points each from two games. — AFP

## Murray looks for quick improvement after Stuttgart exit

**STUTTGART:** Andy Murray said his grass game "needs to improve" if he is to make a decent Wimbledon showing after losing in the first round of the Stuttgart Open on Tuesday. A two-time champion at the All England Club, Murray lost 6-3, 6-4 to star-struck American Marcos Giron, the number 54 who had not won a match in Stuttgart in two previous attempts.

"My game needs to improve, the level of tennis on the tour is high. I need to play better if I want to win more matches," Murray said. The former world number one, a Stuttgart finalist two years ago, had spent time in Britain training on grass after his first-round Roland Garros defeat to Stan Wawrinka last month.

That preparation did not pay off at the Weissenhof Club, whose courts are curated under guidance from All England Club experts. Murray will hope to revive his grass game at Queen's Club, London, his final tune-up before what is almost certain to be the last Wimbledon of his career.

The 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon champion went down in 75 minutes. The Scot will drop out of the Top 120 ranking as a result of his defeat but is not yet panicking with the July 1 Wimbledon start drawing near.

"I've had some tough months, but physically I feel OK just now - the ankle, the back. It's all felt better since going onto grass," he said. In the opening set, Murray volleyed into the net from close range to trail 4-2 with Giron closing out the set three games later.

Murray, who only recently changed racquet brands, expressed disappointment over missing his Stuttgart chances. "I've been struggling with breaking serve. I've not broken for a few matches and that's usually been a strength of mine."

"On a quick surface like grass, the sets are tight. When your chances come you have to be clinical - he was and I wasn't." The 37-year-old won the first six points of the second set but was unable to keep up the momentum. "I grew up watching Andy, it's an honour to be on the court with him," Giron, 30, said. "I'm grateful to beat him and happy with the win. I was excited to get a grass lesson from him." It's unreal what he's done in his career, to play him on grass is unbelievable. — AFP

## Rizwan, Babar keep Pakistan alive at T20 World Cup

**NEW YORK:** Mohammad Rizwan and captain Babar Azam starred as Pakistan stayed alive at the T20 World Cup with a seven-wicket win over Canada on Tuesday.

Knowing defeat would condemn them to a shock first round exit, Rizwan and Babar put on a match-winning second-wicket partnership of 63 as Pakistan reached their target of 107 with 15 balls to spare.

Opener Rizwan finished undefeated on 53 off 53 balls with two fours and a six for his 29th T20 international half-century while Babar made 33 off as many deliveries with one four and a six. The victory came after 2009 champions Pakistan had lost both their first two Group A fixtures.

A stunning super-over humiliation at the hands of the United States was followed by a six-run loss to bitter rivals India in a game where they failed to chase down a modest 120-run target. Tuesday's win at the same Nassau County International Stadium where they came up short against India may still not be enough to secure a place in the second round Super Eights.

Pakistan have two points with one game left while India and the United States both have four points from two wins apiece and remain favourites to progress to the next stage. "We needed this win," said Babar, who explained that Pakistan had been keen to reach their target within 14 overs to overhaul the USA's better run-rate.

"It was in our minds to win before 14 overs but the pitch made it difficult." Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir, who was named man of the match for his 2-13 off four overs, added: "That was a much-needed win to be honest. One more win and who knows?"

Despite the loss, Canada, with two points from three games, are still in the hunt for a Super Eights spot. Dillon Heyliger took two of the Pakistan wickets to fall, dismissing recalled opener Saim Ayub for six

## Olympic athletes turn to diabetes tech in pursuit of medals

**NEW YORK:** Olympians including Dutch marathon runner Abdi Nageeye are using a new tool they hope will boost their medal chances this summer: Tiny monitors that attach to the skin to track blood glucose levels.

Continuous glucose monitors or CGMs were developed for use by diabetes patients but their makers, led by Abbott and Dexcom, also spy opportunities in sports and wellness. The Paris Olympics, which start on July 26, are an opportunity to showcase the technology - even though there is as yet no proof it can boost athletic performance.

"I do see a day where CGM is certainly going to be used outside of diabetes in a big way," said Dexcom's Chief Operating Officer Jacob Leach. Diabetes patients remain the CGM specialist's commercial focus, he told Reuters, but Dexcom is also working with researchers on future use to optimise athletic performance. He would not disclose details.

The CGM market is already worth billions of dollars thanks to demand from diabetes patients, who use the coin-sized adhesive skin patches with a Bluetooth link to a smartphone instead of drawing blood through a finger stick. The readings help determine whether they need an insulin dose.

In March, Dexcom's Stelo device, targeting people with early-stage diabetes who are not on



**NEW YORK:** Canada's Dillon Heyliger (R) celebrates after dismissing Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (L) during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group A cricket match between Pakistan and Canada at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in East Meadow, New York. — AFP

and claiming the prized wicket of Babar, both men caught behind.

Earlier, Pakistan restricted Canada to 106-7 despite opener Aaron Johnson hitting his sixth international fifty. Johnson demonstrated his attacking intent from the start, cracking successive boundaries off the first two balls he faced from Shaheen Shah Afridi.

### Johnson half-century

The Jamaican born 33-year-old opener made 52 off 44 balls with four boundaries and four sixes before he was eventually out in the 14th over with the score on 73-6, clean-bowled by Naseem Shah. Johnson was the only batsman in the top six to reach double figures as Pakistan's seamers took wickets on a regular basis.

insulin, became the first CGM to win US approval for purchase without a prescription. Launch is planned for this summer.

Abbott introduced a CGM product for amateur and elite sports users without diabetes in Europe as early as 2020 and has sponsored Kenyan marathoner Eliud Kipchoge and his team since 2021. Top athletes and their support staff have been using CGMs to optimise calorie intake and workout intensity as they prepare for sport events.

Abbott said it is targeting the non-diabetic consumer market. On Monday it won US approval for its prescription-free Lingo device and smartphone app for health and wellbeing, available in Britain since January at a cost of 120-150 pounds (\$152-\$190) per month. Also on Monday, Abbott won US clearance for its non-prescription system Libre Rio for people with diabetes who do not need insulin, to compete with Dexcom's Stelo.

Dutch marathoner Nageeye, who won silver at the Tokyo Olympics, said he and his coaches are monitoring blood glucose as an indicator of the body's available energy, part of his quest for an "effortless run".

CGM use has guided Nageeye, who has qualified for Paris, to work on sleeping and eating patterns so that he expends a minimum of energy during training. "That's your energy, actually, that's your fuel. We have to monitor that," said Nageeye. His team has been sponsored by Abbott since April 2021.

Australian swimmer Chelsea Hodges, who won relay gold at the Tokyo Olympics, said CGMs had helped her remedy bouts of extreme exhaustion and dizziness during endurance training by making adjustments to her calorie intake and training times.

"They kept picking up wickets but had we scored 130-plus we could have made a game out of it," said Canada skipper Saad Bin Zafar. Amir clean-bowled Navneet Dhaliwal (four) with a 141 km/h delivery which sliced through the defences of the opener.

Shaheen recovered from conceding 10 runs off his first over to get rid of Pargat Singh (two) before Nicholas Kirton (one) was run out by a superb throw by Imad Wasim. Haris Rauf sent back Shreyas Movva (two) -- for his 100th wicket in the format -- and Ravinderpal Singh (nought) in the space of three balls as Canada reached 55-5 after 10 overs.

Once Johnson was out, Canada struggled to press the accelerator and had added just 14 more runs off 20 balls when Saad (10) top-edged Amir to Rizwan behind the stumps. Amir finished with 2-13 while Rauf claimed 2-26. — AFP



**File photo shows a box of Ozempic made by Novo Nordisk is seen at a pharmacy in London, Britain Mar 8, 2024. — Reuters**

She spoke to Reuters while preparing for Paris, but recently ended her swimming career due to hip problems. While companies see growth potential in the gadgets, sports nutrition scientists see a promising field of research.

"A big guesswork for endurance athletes has always been: am I training hard enough or am I training too hard? It seems with CGMs, we have a better understanding," said Associate Professor Filip Larsen of the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences.

Larsen, also chief science officer of sports performance consultancy firm svexa, said the firm has been analysing CGM data collected by several athletes and teams. He said svexa is not sponsored by any CGM maker. Larsen warned, however, that there was little validated science yet on how to optimise an athlete's routines using CGMs. — Reuters

Sports

# Lowly Rwanda, Sudan, Comoros steal World Cup show in Africa

Sudan have 10 points in Group B, Senegal eight and the DRC of Congo seven

**JOHANNESBURG:** Rwanda, Sudan and Comoros, all fifth seeds in six-nation 2026 World Cup qualifying groups, were shock table toppers in Africa on Tuesday after match day four.

Former qualifiers Egypt, Cameroon, shock 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco, African champions Ivory Coast, Algeria and Tunisia lead the other mini-leagues. Qualifying from Africa is a 10-round marathon spread over three years with the nine group winners booking places at the 48-team finals in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

None of the three shock frontrunners are ranked among the top 30 countries in Africa, making their achievements remarkable. However, they will have to wait nine months before they can seek more points as matchday five is scheduled only for March 2025.

Joja Kwizera scored in the final minute of the first half to earn Rwanda a 1-0 win over Lesotho, who played in South African city Durban because they lack a FIFA-approved stadium. Winning under German coach Torsten Spittler took Rwanda to first place in Group C with seven points, ahead of South Africa and Benin on goal difference.

Lesotho have five points, winless top seeds Nigeria three and Zimbabwe two in a group 2024 Africa Cup of Nations runners-up Nigeria and third-placed South Africa were expected to dominate. Substitute Thapelo Morena scored twice in the second half as South Africa defeated neighbours Zimbabwe 3-1 in freezing central city Bloemfontein.

The match began sensationally with both teams scoring within 99 seconds. Iqraam Rayners put South Africa ahead and Tawanda Chirewa equalized. "Thapelo is very quick and I told him to exploit space behind the Zimbabwe defence, which he did

brilliantly," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos.

"I wanted a minimum of four points from the two matchdays this month and that is what we got, so we are on track," added the Belgian, referring to a draw in Nigeria and the win over Zimbabwe.

### Infantino sees Sudan win

Sudan, who cannot play at home because of armed conflict in the east African state, triumphed 3-0 in South Sudan as the neighbors met for the first time. FIFA president Gianni Infantino was in Juba for the opening of the renovated national stadium and saw Walieldin Khedr, in the first half, Yasser Muzamil and Mohamed Yagoub score.

Sudan have 10 points in Group B, Sadio Mane-inspired Senegal eight and the Democratic Republic of Congo seven in what is shaping up as a three-team race for top spot. Comoros, representing an archipelago off the southeastern coast of Africa, replaced Ghana as Group I leaders on goal difference after a 2-0 win over Chad 2-0 in Moroccan city Oujda.

Both goals came in the second half with Myziene Maolida claiming his third of the qualifying campaign and El Fardou Nabouhane his second. Ayoub el Kaabi, who scored the only goal when Olympiacos beat Fiorentina in the 2024 Europa Conference League final, claimed a hat-trick as Morocco hammered Congo Brazzaville 6-0 in Agadir.

Morocco lead Group E - reduced to five teams by the pre-competition withdrawal of Eritrea - with nine points and second-placed Tanzania have six following a surprise 1-0 win in Zambia. Africa Cup of Nations title-holders Ivory Coast surrendered their perfect Group F record by drawing 0-0 with Kenya in Malawi capital Lilongwe, but stayed in first place.



**YAOUNDE:** Cameroon's forward #10 Vincent Aboubakar kicks the ball during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Africa qualifiers group D football match between Cameroon and Cape Verde at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo in Yaounde. - AFP

Cameroon retained top spot in Group D by drawing 1-1 with Angola in Luanda, where Brentford forward Bryan Mbeumo put the visitors ahead in the first half. Michael Ngadeu-Ngadjui conceded an own goal soon after half-time to restore equality, leaving fourth-placed Angola two points adrift of Cameroon.

Of all the winners on Tuesday, Mauritius were among the happiest as they ended a 21-year wait for a qualifying win by defeating fellow minnows Eswatini 2-1 in Saint-Pierre. The Indian Ocean islanders last celebrated a victory in November 2003 when they won 3-1 at home to Uganda. Since then, Mauritius have drawn three matches and lost 10. - AFP



**AVEIRO:** Portugal's forward #17 Rafael Leao kicks the ball during the international friendly match between Portugal and Ireland at the Municipal Stadium in Aveiro, on June 11, 2024, ahead of the UEFA Euro 2024 football tournament in Germany. - AFP

## Ronaldo double helps Portugal beat Ireland in final Euros warm-up

**AVEIRO:** Cristiano Ronaldo struck twice for Portugal as they comfortably beat the Republic of Ireland 3-0 on Tuesday in their final Euro 2024 warm-up friendly. Joao Felix was also on target as Roberto Martinez's side bounced back from a defeat by Croatia last week to build confidence for the tournament in Germany.

Ronaldo, 39, watched that match from the bench but started against Ireland in Aveiro and came close in the first half before dismantling the visitors in the second. Veteran defender Pepe, 41, set to become the oldest player ever to play at the Euros, also started.

Euro 2016 winners Portugal qualified with a 100 percent record but recent performances had allowed some doubts to creep in. "The Portuguese expect a lot from Portugal, there's no margin for error, none, they always want Portugal to win because of the generation, the talent there is," said Ronaldo.

"We have to have our feet on the ground and our

thoughts in the sky, dreaming of the Euros." Ronaldo will appear at a record sixth edition of the tournament, having played in his first back in 2004. "Going back to 2004... my thoughts and my pride remain the same," said Ronaldo. "Playing for the Portuguese national team, it doesn't get better than this. "For the Euros we have to think positively, this team has to dream and has been working hard, because just having talent is no use if there's no hard work."

Felix broke the deadlock with a smart finish after a short corner routine in the 18th minute. Ronaldo almost made it two but his deflected free-kick struck the post. The Al-Nassr striker appealed for a penalty after falling under pressure and then fired a decent opening straight at Caoimhin Kelleher towards the end of the first half.

Ronaldo did not have to wait much longer to score, pouncing soon after the break with a sublime effort curled into the top corner. The former Real Madrid marksman soon grabbed another after Diogo Jota found him well placed in the area.

Ronaldo netted a record-extending 130th international goal with another confident finish. The striker fired inches wide when he might have completed his hat-trick as Ireland, under interim coach John O'Shea, began to tire, although Portugal could not add to their lead. - AFP

## India World Cup hopes end in controversy

**DOHA:** India coach Igor Stimac condemned what he called an "irregular" goal in a 2-1 defeat at Qatar that ended his team's World Cup 2026 qualifying hopes, saying: "It shouldn't happen." The loss in Doha on Tuesday dashed India's dreams of reaching the third round of Asian qualifying for the World Cup for the first time.

India scored in the first half and were on course for a footballing landmark until Youssef Ayman equalized in the 73rd minute. The goal was hugely controversial, with some television replays appearing to show that the ball had gone out of play just beforehand. India's players, some of whom had stopped in the belief the ball had gone out, vehemently protested.

But with VAR technology not in use, the goal stood. Asian champions Qatar, who had already qualified for the next round, scored the winner five minutes before the end to seal India's fate. "Qatar were lucky tonight, especially because they came back from 0-1 with an irregular goal," the former Croatia international defender Stimac told reporters.

"I can confirm that now because I have seen the replay. The whole ball was over the line and the goal was given." He added: "It shouldn't be happening in today's football because that goal changed everything in this game. "As an organization, FIFA has enough power and resources, at least in the crucial games and the World Cup qualifiers, to use VAR."

"It's kind of an injustice to my boys tonight because we were very close to win this game and qualifying for the third round, but it didn't happen," he said. India ended third in the group, with Kuwait joining Qatar in the next qualifying stage following a 1-0 home win over Afghanistan. - AFP

## Erik ten Hag to remain as Man Utd boss

**MANCHESTER:** Erik ten Hag is set to remain as manager of Manchester United following a post-season performance review by club chiefs, British media reports said Tuesday. The BBC said United were understood to be talking to the Dutchman about extending his contract at Old Trafford, which is about to enter its final season. A poor second campaign for Ten Hag ended on a high note as he led United to a shock 2-1 victory in the FA Cup final against rivals Manchester City. But the build-up to the match at Wembley was dominated by talk over Ten Hag's future after a report said he would be sacked by United's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe regardless of the result.

United finished eighth in the Premier League - their lowest placing since 1990 - and crashed out of the Champions League at the group stage. After the FA Cup final, the former Ajax boss, 54, admitted he did not know what the future held for him.

"The only thing I am doing is preparing my team, developing my team, progressing my team and individual players. This is for me a project," he said. "When I came in things were a mess. We are now better but by far not where we want to be." Various managers have been linked with the United job since the end of the season. Ratcliffe was reported to have held talks with Thomas Tuchel last week as speculation mounted over Ten Hag's future but the former Bayern Munich and Chelsea boss reportedly ruled himself out of the running.

The club's interest in Mauricio Pochettino is understood to have cooled even though he is now a free agent after leaving Chelsea. Other managers linked to United have been Graham Potter, Thomas Frank, Roberto De Zerbi and current England boss Gareth Southgate.

Ten Hag ended a six-year trophy drought for United in his first season by lifting the League Cup in 2023 and finished third in the league, encouraging fans that they might launch a Premier League title bid in 2023/24. But they lost 14 games and ended with a negative goal difference, finishing a whopping 31 points behind champions Manchester City. - AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707	Qibla	22459381
Rawda	22517733	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Adaliya	22517144	Mirqab	22456536
Khalidiya	24848075	Sharq	22465401
Kaifan	24849807	Salmiya	25746401
Shamiya	24848913		
Shuwaikh	24814507		
Abdullah Salem	22549134	Sabah Hospital	24812000
Nuzha	22526804	Amiri Hospital	22450005
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764	Maternity Hospital	24843100
Qadsiya	22515088	Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Dasmah	22532265	Chest Hospital	24849400
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908	Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Shaab	22518752	Adan Hospital	23940620
		Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

#### Hospitals

### Change of Name

**I, BALU RAM**, holder of Indian Passport No. M9886812 having permanent address Vp Mahida Nayagaon Kherwara Udaipur Rajasthan India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: given name Babu Lal and surname Patel (12/06/2024)

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## Titmus shatters 200m freestyle world record before Olympics

Heads to Paris as red-hot favourite alongside O'Callaghan



BRISBANE: Australia's Ariarne Titmus (L) reacts with fellow competitors after winning the women's 200m freestyle final in a new world record time during the Australian Swimming Trials at the Brisbane Aquatic Centre on June 12, 2024. — AFP

BRISBANE: Ariarne Titmus shattered fellow Australian Mollie O'Callaghan's 200m freestyle world record Wednesday, touching in 1min 52.23secs just weeks before defending her Olympic title in Paris. She hit the wall in Brisbane at Australia's Olympic trials ahead of O'Callaghan, who also went under her previous world record of 1:52.85, surging home in 1:52.48.

Titmus went out hard and was 0.81sec under the pace at 100m, holding on as her teammate pushed her to the limit. "Looking at the results, it's unbelievable. I'm really happy to finally produce a swim in the 200 that I feel like my training reflects," said Titmus, 23.

"I think just the field we have is why we are swimming so fast. We push each other every day. To have five girls under (trainer) Dean (Boxall) in that final is unbelievable. It's a credit to him and the programme."

Titmus stunned American great Katie Ledecky to clinch gold in Tokyo three years ago. She will head to Paris as a red-hot favorite alongside O'Callaghan, who smashed Italian great Federica Pellegrini's 14-year-old world record last year.

"We push each other to the best of our limits," said 20-year-old O'Callaghan of training and racing with Titmus. "I'm still learning, still getting used to the 200m freestyle. It's a very difficult event to get your head around. The past few days I've just been getting eaten up by nerves."

The pair share eight of the 10 fastest times in history, with Ledecky, Canadian phenomenon Summer McIntosh and Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey all in the chasing pack. So far, McIntosh is the only other swimmer to go under 1:54 this year. Lani Pallister and Brianna Throssell came third and fourth in Brisbane to position themselves to be part of an ominously fast 4x200m relay team. Titmus has been in top form this week, swimming the second-fastest 400m freestyle of all time on Monday as she also prepares to defend that Olympic title. She is also the world record holder.

### Unreal

Cameron McEvoy, who won gold at the 2023 world championships, will also be on the plane.

told Reuters at the 'Lion's Den' gym inside Sheffield's English Institute of Sport where she spars and works out with Britain's elite boxers and coaches. "I worked hard for many years and I'm still working hard."

### Millions of us

Ngamba, whose mother lives in Paris and will be there with other relatives to cheer her on, hopes her story can help others overcome obstacles and hardship. "There's many other refugees out there, there's millions of us. I'm just one of millions. And there's millions that are not being given the opportunity," she said.

"I just hope my story and my journey is kind of inspirational, not only for other refugees but also for other people that have the opportunity so they can achieve amazing things." That story includes being arrested along with her brother, handcuffed and bundled into a van before being sent to separate detention centres in London.

They were released the following day but the situation remained precarious. "I've lived through my life of having that moment where the Home Office and immigration people can come and collect me as I'm walking on the street, as I'm at the house, as I'm going to my school or college," she said.

"They (immigration officials) kept on coming back to me and saying no, no. And then I had to use my sexuality because in Cameroon it's illegal to be gay. You can be sent to prison, you can be killed or be beaten."

There followed background checks, interviews with

He won the men's 50m freestyle in 21.35 ahead of Ben Armbruster to become the first Australian male swimmer to make four Olympics, owning three of the four quickest times this year.

"It's pretty unreal. The job's not done yet, but awesome," said the 30-year-old. Elijah Winnington qualified for the 800m freestyle, coming home in 7:44.90. But Sam Short, who boasts the fourth fastest swim in history, set at the 2023 world championship behind Tunisian winner Ahmed Hafnaoui, was second and outside the time needed to make the grade.

"That's probably not as fast as I've been before or wanted to go, but I don't want to peak here, I want to peak in six weeks' time," said Winnington. Winnington and Short had already qualified in the 400m freestyle, where they are both former world champions and serious Paris medal contenders.

No one hit the Australian qualifying mark - which is more stringent than the official Olympic requirement - in the men's 200m butterfly. — AFP

## Saudi holds talks to create boxing league: Sources

LONDON/RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) is in discussions with multiple boxing stakeholders to create a league, potentially reshaping the competitive landscape of the sport, people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

PIF is looking to invest in a joint venture with some of the sport's stakeholders that would feature more boxing bouts, the people said, speaking on condition of anonymity. A handful of leading promoters including Matchroom Boxing and Golden Boy Promotions are involved in the discussions that could result in a deal valuing the new entity between \$4-5 billion, one of the people said. PIF wants to create a venture that would bring the main sport's organizers together, in which it would take a minority stake, the person added.

Turki al-Sheikh, a close advisor to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has been heavily involved in the sports sector and is chairman of the Saudi General Entertainment Authority, was overseeing the final discussions around a potential deal about a month ago, a second person added. Reuters could not establish the details around how a league would be structured.

PIF and Matchroom Boxing declined to comment and Golden Boy Promotions did not respond to requests for comment. Currently the sport is made up of boxing organizations including the World Boxing Council, the International Boxing Federation, the World Boxing Association, and the World Boxing Organization, which each have their own rules for championship belts.

Saudi Arabia has poured billions of dollars into sport as it seeks to wean the kingdom off of oil dependency under de-facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 program, which aims to bring in tourism, boost the private sector, and create jobs. — Reuters

## A refugee in the ring, Ngamba takes her fight to Paris

SHEFFIELD: Cindy Ngamba had hoped to be boxing for Britain at the Olympics but instead the medal contender will step out in Paris as a refugee in the ring. The 25-year-old, who arrived in Manchester from Cameroon at the age of 10 to join her father and step-siblings, is still waiting for citizenship and a passport from the country she knows as home.

She has been arrested and faced the threat of deportation to West Africa, and has had to provide proof of her sexuality to immigration officials after coming out as gay and before securing refugee status. But if all goes to plan the woman who now has a degree in criminology from the University of Bolton, and talks of joining the police force, could become the first refugee athlete to win an Olympic medal.

The winner of English titles at three weights, Ngamba has been boxing since she was 15 and qualified for the Games on merit in the middleweight (75kg) category. Her potential is not in doubt and Team GB had wanted her with them rather than as an opponent.

"Boxing changed my life," the Bolton-based boxer



SHEFFIELD: Boxer Cindy Ngamba poses for a portrait at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield, Britain. — Reuters

friends and family and messages scrolled through to make sure she was telling the truth. "I just thought OK, this is something else. I'm not fake. I'm not lying. I'm just going to let them do what they've got to do and I just hope everything turns out for the best," she said.

GB Boxing have backed her case and England Boxing helped secure funding as a refugee athlete. The local member of parliament and friends from school, college and university wrote in support. Bubbly out of the ring, and fully focused in it, she has paid her way with part-time work, in a warehouse and as a cleaner, and learned to speak like a local. — Reuters