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## Zionist massacres rock Gaza

Zionists seize West Bank land, kill 5 Palestinians • Hezb retaliates after commander killed



GAZA: Sami Dawood Abu Al-Rous, the father of Palestinian girl Hour, 4, reacts as a relative carries her body after she was killed in a Zionist strike on a house in Nuseirat at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on July 3, 2024. — AFP

**GAZA:** Zionist forces bombed and battled Hamas in Gaza City on Wednesday as tens of thousands of Palestinians scrambled for a safe haven after the army issued an evacuation order for a vast swathe of the territory's south. Apache helicopters and Zionist quadcopter drones flew above Gaza City's Shujaiya district as heavy gunfire echoed through the streets, AFP reporters said.

Meanwhile, the Zionist entity has approved its biggest land seizure in the occupied West Bank in more than three decades, a move criticized by activists on Wednesday as detrimental to Palestinian peace hopes. The 12.7-sq-km of land in the Jordan Valley was officially declared "state property" in June, according to an official declaration obtained by AFP after being revealed by the Peace Now group.

"The size of the area designated for declaration is the largest since the 1993 Oslo Accords, and the year 2024 marks a peak in the extent of declarations of state land," Peace Now said. The Zionist government has seized a total of 23.7 sq km in the West Bank since the start of the year, it said. When land is declared "state property", Palestinians lose private ownership rights and are barred from using it, Peace Now said.

Zionist forces also killed five Palestinians in two military operations in the occupied West Bank where tensions have risen because of the Gaza war. One night-time air strike killed four men at a refugee camp near the town of Tulkarm, which has seen a surge in violence as the Zionist entity has intensified raids.

The Palestinian Authority health ministry said the four were "killed as a result of the occupation's bombing of Nur Shams camp". According to the Palestinian official news agency Wafa, the dead, aged 20 to 25, were killed by a drone near the center of the camp.

One man was killed by Zionist fire in a separate Zionist operation in the northern West Bank city of Jenin, the Palestinian health ministry said in a statement, while a Zionist soldier was killed and a second person wounded in a stabbing attack in a Zionist mall on Wednesday, in which the assailant was shot dead. On Monday, a woman and child were killed in a Zionist raid in Nur Shams, according to Palestinian officials. Four others were wounded.

Separately, Hezbollah said it fired more than 100 rockets at Zionist positions on Wednesday in retaliation for a strike that killed a senior commander in Lebanon, the movement's second such loss in recent weeks. Hezbollah has traded near daily cross-border fire with the Zionist army since its Palestinian ally Hamas attacked the Zionist entity on Oct 7.

The Iran-backed group said "commander Mohammed Naameh Nasser", also known as "Hajj Abu Naameh" had been killed, and also announced the death of a second fighter. In a statement, Hezbollah said that "as part of the response to the attack and assassination that the enemy carried out" in south Lebanon's Tyre, its fighters attacked two positions in the Zionist-annexed Syrian Golan Heights "with 100

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Hijri New Year holiday on July 7

**KUWAIT:** The Civil Service Commission announced on Wednesday that all ministries, government and public institutions would observe an official holiday on Sunday, July 7 on the advent of the new Hijri year 1446. The CSC said in a press release on X that apparatuses and authorities of a special work nature could determine their own timing of the holiday. — KUNA

#### Labour set to win huge majority

**LONDON:** Britain's opposition Labour Party is on track to win the largest majority of any party in modern history at Thursday's election, according to a final YouGov projection published on Wednesday. The analysis predicted Labour would win 431 seats, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives expected to win 102. The Liberal Democrats are set to win 72 seats, and Nigel Farage's Reform UK are forecast to take 3 seats. — Reuters (See Page 6)

#### Russia's Dagestan bans niqab

**MOSCOW:** Russia's southern Dagestan region on Wednesday issued a temporary ban against wearing the full-face niqab veil in the Muslim-majority republic, citing security reasons after a recent attack against churches and synagogues. The niqab is "temporarily prohibited until the elimination of existing threats", said Dagestan's highest religious body. — AFP

#### New Egypt government sworn in

**CAIRO:** Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi swore in a new government on Wednesday, just months after starting his third six-year term. The 30-member cabinet is led by Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly. Four women are among the new ministers. Ahmed Kouchouk, a former deputy finance minister, now heads the finance ministry. Badr Abdel Ati succeeds veteran diplomat Sameh Shoukry as foreign minister, while Abdel Majid Saqr replaces Mohammed Zaki at the defense ministry. — AFP

### Holders of fake diplomas sent to prosecution

**KUWAIT:** Education Minister Dr Adel Al-Adwani has referred holders of high school diplomas from Gulf, Arab and other countries to the public prosecution, revoking their fake certificates and contacting relevant authorities to correct the procedure, aiming to combat the phenomenon of forged certificates. In a press statement on Wednesday, Adwani explained that this action fol-

lows the recommendations of the ministry of education's investigation committee regarding high school diplomas from Arab countries, which had been approved by the Private Education Department, and consequently revoked. He underscored the implementation of actual measures in enforcing the law and stated his commitment to combating violations and continuing the reform process for the nation's future.

Additionally, the minister adopted the legal sector's recommendation at the ministry of higher education to refer holders of post-secondary certificates to the public prosecution, as this referral is for presenting false documents and altering data in academic certificates to

obtain accreditation. Adwani asserted his full commitment to fighting the phenomenon of forged certificates, referring holders of these fake certificates to the public prosecution is the first phase, with more referrals to follow to completely eliminate this issue, which poses a threat to the education system and job market.

He added that this is to uphold integrity and transparency in society by enforcing regulations, ensuring that unqualified individuals do not take opportunities from those who deserve them. Adwani pointed out the importance of maintaining the integrity, quality and productivity of work, which positively impacts the job market and national economy. — KUNA



### Putin, Xi vie for influence at SCO summit

**ASTANA, Kazakhstan:** The leaders of Russia and China on Wednesday hailed their efforts to harden their anti-Western alliance at a summit in Kazakhstan, seeking to press their influence in the strategic Central Asian region. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping were in Astana for a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

(SCO) — a Beijing-led regional bloc that covers Central Asia, India and Iran and is designed as a counterweight to US influence in international affairs.

In televised opening remarks ahead of a bilateral meeting, Putin told Xi that Russia's ties with China were stronger than ever and touted the SCO as a powerful instrument to advance their foreign policy agendas. "Russian-Chinese relations, our comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation, are experiencing their best period in history," Putin said.

Moscow and Beijing have deepened their political, military and economic links since Russia invaded Ukraine in Feb 2022. Continued on Page 6



### Biden under pressure as Dems panic

**WASHINGTON:** Joe Biden scrambled Wednesday to save his reelection bid, with pressure mounting on him to pull out following a disastrous debate showing, and the president himself reportedly saying the coming days could be make-or-break. The 81-year-old told a key ally he must convince the public quickly that he can do the job,

The New York Times and CNN reported, raising the stakes for Biden's first post-debate TV interview, scheduled for Friday.

"He knows if he has two more events like that, we're in a different place," the ally said, discussing the president's poor showing against Donald Trump in Atlanta last week, according to the Times. White House spokesman Andrew Bates said in a brief denial on social media that the claim was "absolutely false".

Democratic establishment figures have voiced bafflement over what they see as deflection and anodyne excuses from the president and his aides after his often incoherent debate perfor-

mance. And in Congress, lawmakers see Democratic prospects of taking over the House of Representatives, hanging on to the Senate and returning to the White House slipping away, four months ahead of the election.

The concern followed reports that post-debate polling by progressive non-profit OpenLabs found that New Hampshire, Virginia and New Mexico — all once safe Biden states — are now in play for Trump. Biden was also buffeted by new research showing Trump up three to six points nationwide since the debate, with 75 percent of voters believing Democrats

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## Local

# Only Kuwait banner and anthem are allowed in state functions

## Make sure staff remain in office during working hours, Cabinet tells CSC

KUWAIT: State institutions are required to avoid raising banners or playing national anthems other than those of Kuwait during official functions inside or outside the country, the Cabinet said in a statement following its weekly meeting Tuesday. Meanwhile, the Cabinet instructed the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to take necessary measures to insure that employees at state departments remain in office during working hours and urged them to use finger biometric scanners, facial recognition systems and other electronic means.

The Cabinet held its weekly meeting on Tuesday at Bayan Palace. The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sharida Al-Maousherji stated the following: The Council of Ministers began its meeting by offering sincere congratulations and blessings to the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, asking Allah to protect them.

The ministers also congratulated the noble Kuwaiti people and Kuwait's residents on the occasion of Hijri New Year. The Cabinet was informed of the decision of the Civil Service Bureau

to declare Hijri New Year holiday on Sunday, July 7, 2024. The Council of Ministers discussed the recommendation in the minutes of the meeting of the Ministerial Legal Affairs Committee on a draft decree-law on issuing the unified system of voluntary work in the GCC countries. The ministers decided to approve the draft decree and submitted it to His Highness the Amir.

On the other hand, the Cabinet reviewed other recommendations in the minutes of the meeting of the ministerial Economic Affairs Committee on decrees and laws linking the budgets of ministries, government departments, and bodies for the fiscal year 2024-2025. The Minister of Finance, Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, and the Ministry officials made a visual presentation on this matter. The ministers decided to approve these decrees and submitted them to His Highness the Amir.

The Council of Ministers tasked the Ministry of Finance with the following: (1) To present its perceptions on financial and economic reforms to ensure the financial sustainability of the state as well as maximizing non-oil revenues. (2) To take measures to address overspending and wasting of resources. (3) To submit a quarterly periodic report to the Council of Ministers on the implementation of the general budget of the state for the current fiscal year 2024-2025. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over a Cabinet weekly meeting on Tuesday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

## E-vehicles 'will not' hinder oil demand

KUWAIT: Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) Secretary General Jamal Al-Loughani announced Wednesday that the impact of the recent electric vehicle industry expansion would not hinder the global demand for oil in short and medium terms. According to a recent study conducted on electronic vehicles (e-vehicles) commissioned by OAPEC titled "Electric Vehicles: Realities and Prospects," transportation is an important part of everyday life, where e-vehicle sales have taken precedence over conventional combustion engine-equipped vehicles.

Though e-vehicles have been in the process of replacing conventional methods of vehicle transportation since 2008, there are obstacles e-vehicle manufacturers have yet to address. Therefore, the manufacturers focused on having their e-vehicles furnished and equipped with state-of-the-art features that would improve their performance, increasing consumers' interest, and subsequently competing with conventional vehicles in the market.

The study brought to attention the negative environmental impacts of conventional vehicles, where carbon dioxide emissions have a hand in climate change, as opposed to the "environmentally friendly" e-vehicles. The common and repeated term "environmentally friendly," elaborated Al-Loughani, is in need of reevaluation, where prejudiced opinions against conventional transportation are not at the forefront.

The objective reevaluation of e-vehicles' limited carbon footprint on the environment should consider battery maintenance and electric charge sources, among other concerns. Notwithstanding the current obstacles e-vehicles face, it is apparent that e-vehicles reduce pollution in crowded cities and might improve their positive impact on the environment if these vehicles generated electricity from sustainable sources, Al-Loughani added.

Currently, e-vehicles' high costs are in need of monetary support from the government, indicating that profits are not always direct. However, positive environmental returns in the future may constitute a justification for governmental financial support. Al-Loughani affirmed the interest of most Arab countries in e-vehicles' potential environmental sustainability.

However, Al-Loughani underscored the importance of examining some potential setbacks in switching completely to e-vehicles, such as locating the pressure point on electricity networks, demand for electricity, and the needed infrastructure in handling the quantity of electricity to charge and sustain e-vehicles. The study asserted that renewable energy sources are not enough to secure the necessary and sustainable demand, underscoring the need for fossil fuels for adequate energy generation and concluding that global oil demand will not be significantly impacted by the rise of e-vehicle sales in the near future. — KUNA



Initiative focuses on topics like robotics, AI, and cybersecurity.



Youth Camp empowers students of all ages.

## Kuwait University, Zain invest in youth's digital capabilities

KUWAIT: Zain announces its support for the Youth Power Tech Summer Camp 2024, organized by the Computer Science Department of the College of Science, Kuwait University. This initiative aims to enhance young people's digital skills through a variety of engaging workshops and activities in tech-related areas during the summer. The initiative is a result of the shared vision between the Computer Science

Department and Zain to cultivate a digitally capable generation, with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields that are increasingly prioritized by today's markets.

The program is organized in collaboration with the Women's Cultural and Social Society, Al-Sayer Holding Group, and Marina FM. It is supervised by faculty members and assistant faculty members from the Computer Science Department, the College of Science's Computer Science Club, and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training's Hemma educational volunteer program.

The Youth Power Tech Summer Camp aims to empower 100 middle school, high school, and university students who are passionate about technology through daily workshops, training sessions,

and panel discussions. These activities cover topics such as robotics, coding, sensors, artificial intelligence, machine learning, cybersecurity, data privacy, and more.

In addition to technical skills, the initiative focuses on developing interpersonal skills like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, effective communication, and problem-solving. These skills are essential for personal and professional success and help prepare students for their future careers. This unique experience aims to foster students' passion for technology and encourage them to pursue STEM careers. It also highlights the effective partnership between the public and private sectors in empowering the next generation of innovators in Kuwait.

## Kuwait and Egypt laud historic ties

KUWAIT: The Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and the Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Dr Mahmoud Bushehri, have praised the depth of historical and distinctive relations that unite Kuwait and Egypt and the interconnection of the two brotherly nations. This came in a statement made by Minister Bushehri to journalists after participating in the celebration held by the Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait on the occasion of the anniversary of the July 23 revolution.

The Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait, Osama Shaltout, said in a speech during the ceremony that the relationship between the two countries is "typical and based on trust and mutual support that extends for decades." He added that from the first days of (Kuwait) independence, Egypt has stood as a steadfast ally and has provided unshakable solidarity at all times to Kuwait, which has similarly stood by Egypt at various times. This is reflected in various aspects of joint cooperation in the sectors of investment, trade, energy, infrastructure, health-care, education, culture, and tourism.



Osama Shaltout



KUWAIT: Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait marks the anniversary of the July 23 revolution. The Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and the Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Dr Mahmoud Bushehri praises the depth of historical and distinctive relations that unite Kuwait and Egypt and the interconnection of the two brotherly nations. — KUNA photos

He referred to the state visit of the Amir His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Egypt, where His Highness was received by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. His Highness was honored with the highest Egyptian decoration. "The relationship between Egypt

and Kuwait is witnessing positive growth and development at political, military, humanitarian, economic, and cultural levels," he added. The Egyptian ambassador expressed his country's appreciation for Kuwait's great role in providing humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. — KUNA

## Kuwait supports women, widows

KUWAIT: Acting undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Dr Khalid Al-Ajmi, confirmed on Tuesday that Kuwait is one of the distinguished countries in the application of charters and laws related to women's rights, especially widows. This came in a speech delivered on the occasion of International Widows' Day, which falls on June 23 annually. Al-Ajmi said that Kuwait, with its institutions, is keen to provide material and moral support to the families of divorced housewives and widows. He pointed to "the true Islamic religion that urges care and support of the widow," noting that Kuwait has been keen to provide all aspects of care and service to widows. — KUNA





Local

# Some businesses and professions bow to technology, artificial intelligence

## Future workforce should become generalists rather than specialists: Expert

By Passant Hisham, Chidi Emmanuel

**KUWAIT:** As a result of technological advancements, certain businesses, occupations, and professions are becoming less common and obsolete. Just a few years ago, there were lots of call centers, shoemakers, watch repairers, photo studios, travel agents, etc. in Kuwait, but with the advancement of technology, many businesses and occupations are becoming old-fashioned. These trends reflect broader shifts in technology and consumer preferences, leading to the decline of certain jobs while also creating new opportunities.

"With the rise of online booking platforms, fewer people now use traditional travel agents to plan their trips. With or without artificial intelligence (AI), many businesses and professions are gradually fading away. It is not only travel agents; the decline in physical mail due to email and digital communication has badly affected post offices and their services. It is rare to see anyone using post offices these days," Abbas Amr, a travel agent, told the Kuwait Times.

For Arjun Viraj, an Asian watch repairer in Maliya, business is no longer as usual. "Actually, people now prefer to buy new watches instead fixing their old watches. Many people don't even wear watches any-

more. They use their mobile phones to check time. I am now learning how to fix computers," he said.

With the escalating global fear of AI taking over our jobs and leaving us at risk of sudden unemployment, Ronny Engen, an AI and strategy expert, offers a different perspective. While he agrees that some jobs might entirely disappear, he believes that others will simply rely more on automated bots and less on human workers. According to Engen, jobs involving research, data collection, and information processing are particularly susceptible to this shift.

He referred to jobs such as paralegals, whose role mainly focuses on assisting lawyers by collecting relevant legal information. Jobs like translators, bookkeepers, and cashiers are also at equal risk. Supporting his argument, he said, "I used machine translation software once, and I think it effectively does 95 percent of the translator's job." Regarding cashiers, he noted that a popular grocery store in Kuwait has already started using automated scanning services to handle product scanning, payment, and checkout procedures.

Job roles that are systematically performed and don't require creative input are also at risk. Engen mentioned cleaners and taxi drivers who could be replaced by automated driving software, and se-

curity guards who could be replaced by advanced cameras for pattern and facial recognition. Yet, after all, Engen believes that many people can still have a chance to secure their jobs, as throughout decades and with advancements in technology, humans have always found a way back to the market, with new roles to be in control of. "You will always see people coming to a shop needing human help, but instead of having 10 cashiers, maybe you can do with one and the rest are automated."

For the market to always demand human capital, he highlighted the need for the future workforce to become generalists rather than specialists. People must build broad knowledge across different fields. "The best thing that people can do is become forever learners. Always study, always learn new things, be hungry for knowledge, and be ready to take on a ca-



Ronny Engen



reer. Be ready to branch out of it. Find things where you have transferable skills," he advised.

When it comes to specialist jobs, individuals need to learn how to utilize AI to enhance their tasks effectively. They must know how to critique AI's work and guide it throughout the process. "I tend to think of AI like this: imagine you had the top student from the top university in the world, and they got their first job with you. They are like interns - great, good, amazing, but with no experience. Right? So, you're always on top, always checking everything," Engen explained.



Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan attends the 46th Engineering Design Exhibition at College of Engineering and Petroleum. — KUNA photos

## Minister emphasizes KU graduates' contributions to Kuwait's development

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, emphasized on Wednesday the importance of Kuwait university's graduates and their significant contribution to Kuwait's development. In her speech at the opening of the 46th Engineering Design Exhibition at the College of Engineering and Petroleum, Minister Al-Mashaan

stated that Kuwait has continuously supported the national cadre.

She mentioned that the exhibition, which has been held by the college since 1966, supplies the labor market with qualified youths in various engineering fields and represents a valuable opportunity to showcase the skills of engineers and the latest developments in engineering design. She stressed the importance of highlighting and supporting engineering innovations to enhance this sector and motivate professionals to achieve further progress and development in Kuwait.

Dr Mashaan noted that government institutions' support for this exhibition reflected an interest in

developing the engineering sector and enhancing the role of innovation and creativity in this field. She encouraged the students and graduates by adding that Kuwait has provided all necessary financial resources to create a suitable environment for academic achievement and competition in the labor market and to contribute to driving development and enhancing Kuwait Vision 2035. The College of Engineering and Petroleum organized the 46th Engineering Design Exhibition with the support of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS), involving 279 engineers from various specialties in the college with 69 engineering projects. — KUNA

## FM receives US Ambassador



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya met with US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sahara at the Ministry on Wednesday. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral ties, ways to develop them in all fields and strategic cooperation between the two countries. — KUNA photos

## Young engineers showcase talents

By Esraa Alharran

**KUWAIT:** The Engineering Design Exhibition took place on Wednesday in the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University. This event was used to introduce young engineers and inventors to the rest of the world. From the Mechanical Engineering Department, engineer Fahad Alotaibi focused on recycling - reusing tires to produce construction materials, new tires, and raw materials.

Alotaibi talked about his project to the Kuwait Times, saying, "The tough climate, economic prosperity, and cultural preferences, in addition to various other factors, led to an increase in the use of automobiles in Kuwait, thereby making it one of the largest tire graveyards. This pioneering project, 'RE-TIRE,' is aimed at designing a unique mechanical device that combines multiple mechanical operations into one. A portable tire recycler was designed to solve this growing problem."

### VisualEyes

One of the outstanding electrical engineering projects took another route. They worked on a project called "VisualEyes." Engineer Abdulbarie Alrashidi said that VisualEyes is an innovative and multifunctional smart glass that is aimed at improving the lives of blind people. These smart glasses offer innovative features such as emergency incident detection, object recognition, and barcode scanning. Thanks to its low cost and accessibility, VisualEyes is an effective solution with a positive impact on the lives of the blind. VisualEyes provides a great opportunity to transform wearable assistive technology and improve the lives of people with visual impairments.

### Failaka Link Project

The Kuwait Times also conversed with engineer Munera Alotaibi (Civil Engineering Department). Their project, "The Failaka Link Project," is an innovative infrastructure project with the goal of improving access to Failaka Island. "This project focuses on creating a sustainable and smart bridge design that aligns with Kuwait's vision for technological advancement, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification. It integrates renewable energy sources, advanced technologies for structural health monitoring, and eco-friendly construction materials. The Failaka Link serves as a model for future infrastructure projects. The project prioritizes minimal environmental impact, efficient energy use, and improved accessibility, thus fostering economic growth and tourism development for Failaka Island," Alotaibi explained.

Engineer Leen Adel and her team (in industrial en-



Engineers Fahad Alotaibi, Abdulrahman Alkhudair and Hesham Khalil explaining Re-Tire project.



Engineer Leen Adel describing The Implementation of IE tools project.

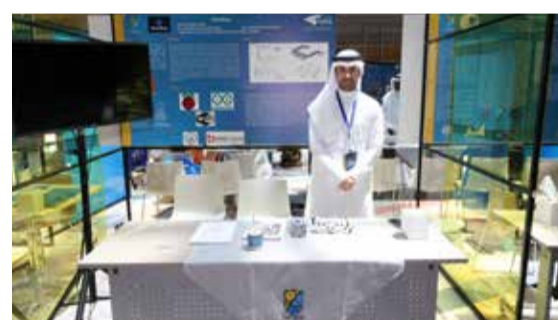
gineering) said, "The Implementation of IE Tools at Numou" is a project that will analyze the status of a subscription-based brand for healthy food and utilize industrial engineering methodologies within food production facilities to insure both food quality and process efficiency, enabling precise decision-making devoid of randomness."

### Optimization

From the Petroleum Engineering Department, engineer Maryam Alnamshan stated that our project - "Optimization of retrograde gas condensate production in shale reservoirs" - aims to maximize economic profits in shale reservoirs by using multi-stage hydraulic fracturing techniques. Key objectives include optimizing the extraction process to yield the greatest return on investment, increasing well-bore permeability, adhering to environmental standards to minimize negative impacts on the ecosystem, and adhering to engineering standards to ensure safety, reliability, and integrity in the extraction process."

### The Hi-Lorm

Moving to the computer engineering projects, 'The Hi-Lorm' project was one of the amazing projects that targets a specific group of people, often overlooked, with dual disabilities, namely the deaf and blind. En-



Engineer Abdulbarie Alrashidi with the VisualEyes project.



Optimization of retrograde gas condensate production in shale reservoir by Maryam Alnamshan.

gineer Saud Alajmi noted that "these are individuals who neither see nor hear. They have a special tactile language called Lorm, which is expressed through sequential swipes and taps on the palm of the hand, forming letters in English. It features a wireless glove and 3D-printed glasses designed to facilitate communication and enhance mobility. The glove, equipped with touch sensors and vibration motors, translates Lorm language swipes and touches into English speech, outputting through a built-in speaker in the glasses."

"A microphone in the glasses captures the speech of the person in front of the deaf and blind user and converts it into a sequence of vibrations. The glasses also include a camera that identifies people speaking to the deaf and blind and informs the user, and there is an ultrasonic sensor for obstacle warnings. The caregiver app allows for remote chatting and monitoring, location tracking, and adding new contacts when unknown faces are detected. This innovative system significantly reduces isolation and dependence on human translators by deaf and blind individuals," Alajmi explained.

### NABTH

"NABTH" (from the Chemical Engineering Department) is an innovative project that combines the medical field and the sustainability world. Engineer Jenan



The Failaka Link project.



'Hi-LORM project' by engineer Abdulrahman Sayed and Saud Alajmi.



Project 'NABTH' with engineer Nourah Alahmad and Jenan Alfaikawy.

Alfaikawy and her team explained that "the main purpose of this project is to extract PHAs from microalgae and lipids as byproducts. The PHAs will then be used in the medical field to manufacture heart valves. We utilized it because it is the market's most promising sustainable replacement for plastic. Additionally, it comes up naturally from bacteria or algae and can biodegrade in aquatic environments and landfills."



## Kuwait, Singapore hold first round of consultations

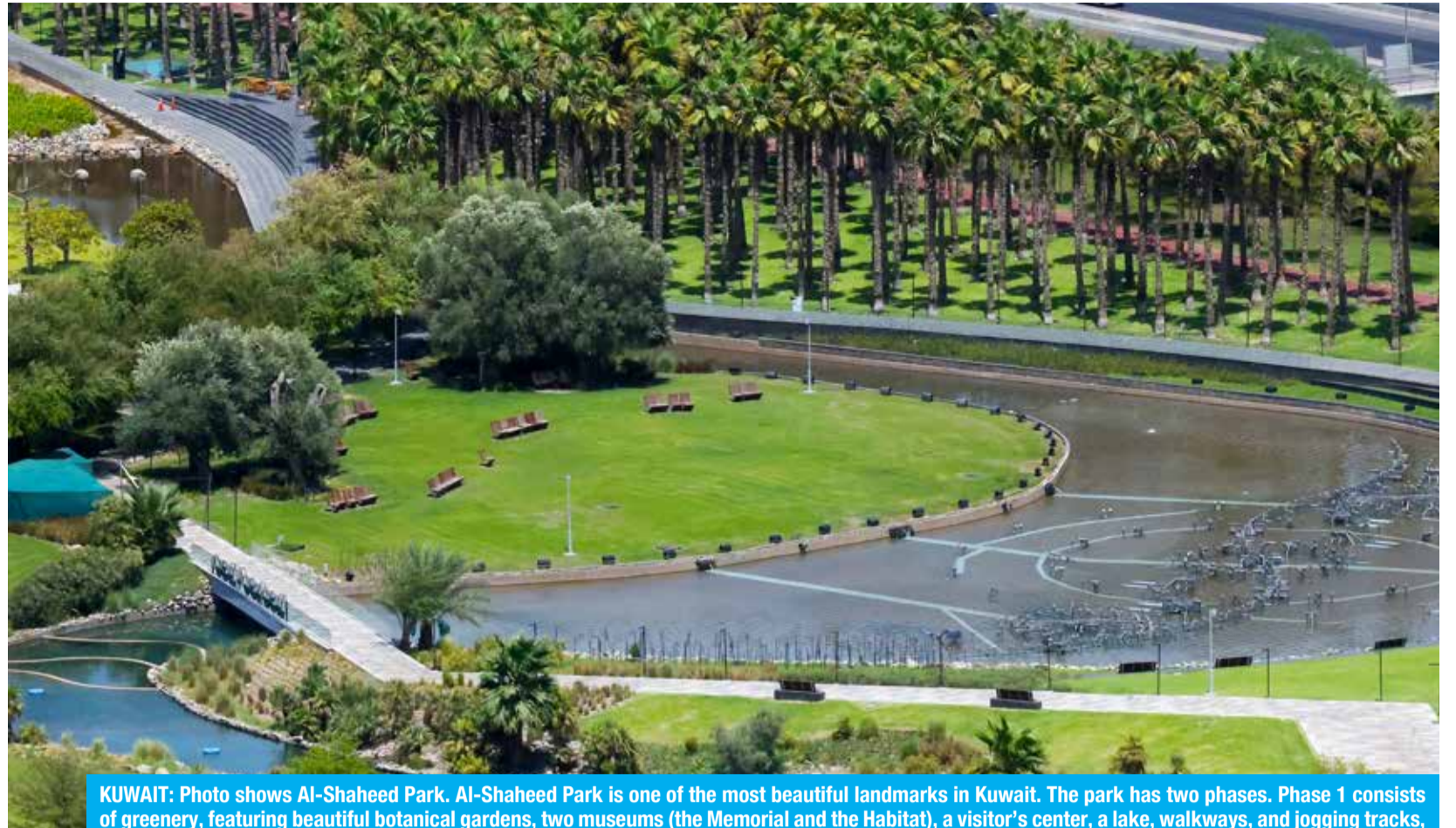


**SINGAPORE:** Kuwait and Singapore on Wednesday held the first round of their bilateral consultations at the level of senior officials in the ministries of foreign affairs of the two countries. Kuwait's Embassy in Singapore said in a statement that the Kuwaiti side was headed during the consultations by Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Samih Hayat, while the Singaporean side was headed by Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Asia-Pacific Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, Kevin Cheuk.

During the consultations, they reviewed bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and ways to strengthen and develop them in all areas of common interest. They discussed preparations for the 40th anniversary of the establishment and start of bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries, which will be next year, and other important developments at the regional and international levels.

The two sides confirmed their aspiration to hold the work of the first session of the Joint Committee at the level of foreign ministers in the near future. Ambassador Hayat delivered a written letter from Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya to his Singaporean counterpart, Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, which included an official invitation to visit Kuwait. The meeting was attended by the Kuwait Ambassador to Singapore, Ahmed Al-Shuraim, and the non-resident ambassador of Singapore to Kuwait, Zain Al-Abidin Rashid, in addition to other officials from both sides. — KUNA

### Photo of the day



**KUWAIT:** Photo shows Al-Shaheed Park. Al-Shaheed Park is one of the most beautiful landmarks in Kuwait. The park has two phases. Phase 1 consists of greenery, featuring beautiful botanical gardens, two museums (the Memorial and the Habitat), a visitor's center, a lake, walkways, and jogging tracks, making it the largest urban park in Kuwait. Phase 2 has plants, fountains, and several facilities such as paths for pedestrians, lanes for bicycles, parking lots, etc. Phase 3 is currently under construction. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Arab League seeks viable solution to forced migration, refugees crisis

## Gaza war unleashes a maelstrom of human misery

**CAIRO:** Finding viable solutions to the issue of forced migration and the refugee crisis is tremendously important and will lead to progress in the humanitarian and development domains, said Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit on Wednesday. This came in a speech from Abul-Gheit at the second regional conference reviewing the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in the Context of the Arab Region.

A number of prominent officials attended the event, including the IOM's Director General, Amy Pope. Abul-Gheit said that the migration from and into the Arab region was an integral part of the global migration movement, and it had some serious social and economic impacts. He noted that the region hosts around 41.4 million immigrants and refugees and is also the launch pad for the migration of 32.8 million migrants and refugees from the region.

He indicated that the various challenges in the region increased problems on several levels, with many countries carrying the burden of providing for migrants and refugees,



**GAZA:** Palestinians walk and drive past buildings destroyed during Zionist bombardment, in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on July 3, 2024. — AFP

which put an extra load on their economies and infrastructure. Abul-Gheit added that climate change was another factor leading to forced migration, stressing that natural disasters and increased temperatures played a very real role in forcing people to leave their homes and lands.

Arab countries were aware of the impact of climate change on the movement of people; therefore, several initiatives and plans, in accordance with UN regulations, were devised to counter such a problem, he stressed. He went on to say that wars play a grim factor in forcing people to move, noting that the Arab region had witnessed several of them. On the issue of Palestine and relating it to forced immigration, the top Arab League official asserted the right of the Palestinian people, whether in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, or elsewhere, to return to their land and homes.

He deemed what Zionist occupation was doing to Palestinians as war crimes, especially the ones in the Gaza Strip, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the war-torn region at once. The two-day conference will host a number of discussions focusing on organized migration and the forced movement of people from their lands due to several factors. The human rights of migrants and refugees would also be discussed. Several Arab, regional, and international organizations shared the organizing duties of the event. Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the Arab League, Abdulaziz Al-Ajmi, is partaking in the conference.

### Maelstroms of human misery

With their homes shattered and lives upended by war, civilians in Gaza are clinging to their dignity under the most inhumane conditions, UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator Sigrid Kaag said. "The war has not merely created a humanitarian crisis; it has unleashed a maelstrom of human misery," she said in a briefing to the UN Security Council.

The UN coordinator pointed out that public services have collapsed and over 1.9 million people have now been displaced, she told ambassadors at the Security Council, underscoring the critical need for a full, immediate, and complete ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and unhindered aid across the enclave. Kaag emphasized that while humanitarian assistance will be required for years to come, planning and preparing for early recovery and reconstruction are equally important.

She urged the UN Security Council members to consider immediate actions that complement and support the humanitarian response. "We cannot ask Palestinian civilians to put their future on hold while they cling to their human dignity under inhumane conditions," she said. The Senior Coordinator also highlighted that the Palestinian Authority (PA) has a critical role in Gaza, integral to the enclave's recovery and reconstruction, and urged the international community to ensure the PA's financial stability and support its reform, governance, and other capacities necessary to reassume its responsibilities. — KUNA

## Arabian Gulf Theater troupe performs in Jordanian capital

**AMMAN:** The troupe of the Arabian Gulf Theater presented a play on Tuesday as part of the activities of the International Free Theater Nights Festival, which is being held (in its 19th session) in the Jordanian capital, Amman. The events of the play embodied situations experienced by a writer with a disease called multiple personality disorder. The play began with a series of events.

The Royal Cultural Center Theater, one of the most prominent and prestigious Jordanian cultural monuments, hosted the theatrical performance, which was watched by Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan, Hamad Al-Marri, diplomats, and other dignitaries. The director of the play, Faisal Al-Obaid, told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the reactions were satisfactory.

Al-Obaid stressed that the success of any artwork is linked to the reactions of the audience. "We always promise to develop our shows and present quality works of arts," he said. The activities of the 19th International Free Theater Nights Festival were launched in strategic partnership with the Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts and with the support of the Jordanian Ministry of Culture. — KUNA



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120,000 'stolen' babies: Georgia's trafficking scandal

## Terror, 'chaos' as India's deadliest stampede in a decade kills 121

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OCEANPORT, US: US President Joe Biden walks with First Lady Jill Biden, as granddaughters Natalie and Finnegan walk ahead, after stepping off Marine One upon arrival at Fort Monmouth Landing Zone in Oceanport, New Jersey. — AFP

# Democrats shocked; White House fights anxiety over Biden's future

President stumbles over words, exacerbating fears about his age

## Dangerous skin diseases spreading among Gaza kids



GAZA: Palestinian baby girl Wateen Al-Adasi, who developed a skin condition due to malnutrition, rests at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on July 2, 2024. — AFP

DEIR EL-BALAH: Wafaa Elwan's five-year-old son cannot sleep in the Gaza tent city where she and her seven children shelter, but it is not the guns of war that cause his daily nightmare. "My son can't sleep through the night because he can't stop scratching his body," the anxious mother said.

The boy has white and red blotches over his feet and legs, and more under his T-shirt. He is one of many Gazans suffering from skin infections ranging from scabies to chicken pox, lice, impetigo and other debilitating rashes. More than 150,000 people in the Palestinian territory have contracted skin diseases in the squalid conditions into which displaced Gazans have been forced since the Zionist-Hamas war erupted on October 7, according to the World Health Organization.

"We sleep on the ground, on sand where worms come out underneath us," said Elwan. Her family is one of thousands living on a sandy patch near the sea close to the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah. Elwan believes infections are inevitable. "We cannot bathe our children as before. There are no hygiene and sanitary products for us to wash and clean the place. There's nothing."

Parents used to tell their children to wash in the Mediterranean. But pollution that has built up as war has devastated basic facilities has accentuated the risk of disease. "The sea is all sewage. They even throw garbage and baby napkins into the sea," she said. The WHO has reported 96,417 cases of scabies and lice since the start of the war in Gaza, 9,274 cases of chickenpox, 60,130 cases of skin rashes and 10,038 impetigo cases. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Democrats shocked by Joe Biden's dismal debate performance urged the US president Tuesday to be transparent about his mental fitness as he faced the first call from his own side to drop out of the election. Some supporters have expressed growing doubts about the 81-year-old's candidacy after last week's televised showdown with Donald Trump, when Biden stumbled over his words and lost his train of thought—exacerbating fears about his age.

Congressman Lloyd Doggett became the first Democratic lawmaker to publicly call on Biden to make way for another candidate, saying he was hopeful the president would "make the painful and difficult decision to withdraw." Nancy Pelosi, a Democratic Party heavyweight and former speaker of the House, said it was "legitimate" to ask whether Biden's debate disaster was indicative of a deeper problem rather than a one-off.

Biden has not given a live interview since the debacle, but will be interviewed by ABC on Friday with the first clips released later that day. On Tuesday, he blamed exhaustion from international travel for his debate flop. Speaking at a fundraiser, Biden said he "wasn't very smart" for "traveling around the world a couple times... shortly before the debate." "I didn't listen to my staff," he said. "And then I almost fell asleep on stage."

## Hurricane Beryl bears down on Jamaica

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Powerful Hurricane Beryl churned toward Jamaica on Wednesday with dangerous winds and sea surge, as residents hunkered down against a storm that has killed seven people and caused destruction in the Caribbean. The hurricane—unusually strong so early in the Atlantic season—was expected to pass near or over Jamaica by midday as a life-threatening Category 4 storm, meteorologists said. Beryl is the first storm since US National Hurricane Center (NHC) records began to reach the Category 4 level in June and the earliest to reach Category 5 in July.

Across Jamaica, people removed boats from the water and tied them to fences for safety and rushed to buy food, water, gasoline and other essentials.

As of Wednesday morning the storm was packing maximum sustained winds 145 mph (235 kph), said the NHC. Prime Minister Andrew Holness declared an island-wide 6 am to 6 pm curfew.

Desmon Brown, manager of the National Stadium in Kingston, said his staff has tried to be ready.

"We're doing the usual, removing all objects that can cause damage," he told the Jamaica Observer newspaper. "We've taped up our windows, covered our equipment—including computers, printers and that sort of thing. Apart from that, it's mainly concrete so there's not much we can do," Brown said.

Biden traveled to France from June 5 to 9 to commemorate the 1944 Allied landings, headed back to the United States, and then flew to Italy for a G7 summit followed immediately by a visit to California.

He then returned home and went to a presidential retreat for several days of rest and preparation for the debate. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Tuesday admitted the debate was "a bad night" but added that Biden "knows how to come back" from adversity.

She dismissed questions about him needing a cognitive test, and said the president would hold a press conference during a NATO summit in Washington next week. The polling margins between the president and his Republican predecessor have been razor-thin for months, with Trump showing a slight advantage. Biden pushed for an unusually early first debate in hopes that he could jolt the race while there was still time—but the plan backfired. Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse told WPRI-TV he was "pretty horrified" by the president's performance during the 90-minute CNN match-up, watched by more than 50 million Americans.

Jared Golden, a vulnerable Democrat in a conservative-leaning House district, raised eyebrows with an op-ed in his local paper in Maine in which he said Biden's poor showing "was not a surprise."

"The outcome of this election has been clear to me

for months: While I don't plan to vote for him, Donald Trump is going to win," he wrote. The White House said Biden would meet with Democratic governors on Wednesday evening. One of them, J B Pritzker of Illinois, explained that the governors had asked for the opportunity to hear from the president directly.

"Right now, Joe Biden is our nominee, and I'm 100 percent on board with supporting him as our nominee, unless he makes some other decision, and then I think we're all going to be discussing what's the best way forward," he told CNN.

Biden has visibly slowed over the last year. It has been several months since the president, who has tripped or fallen in public on several occasions, stopped using his plane's high gangway, preferring a shorter, more stable staircase. He has also surrounded himself with aides for the short walk from the White House to his helicopter on the lawn, hoping to prevent cameras from focusing on his stiff gait.

Biden, who has always been gaffe-prone, has not given a long press conference since January 2022 and spends most weekends in one of his Delaware homes, with no official schedule.

Vice President Kamala Harris—a leading contender to replace Biden if he exits the race—said Tuesday she was proud to be his running mate. "We beat Trump once and we're going to beat him again," she said. —AFP



CUMANACOA, Venezuela: People stand outside their flooded homes after a river swelled due to heavy rains following the passage of Hurricane Beryl on the road from Cumana to Cumanacoa, Sucre State, Venezuela, on July 2, 2024. — AFP

Rain from the outer bands of Beryl started pounding Jamaica overnight Tuesday into Wednesday.

Hurricane warnings were also issued in the Cayman Islands further west, which Beryl was expected to pass near or over on Wednesday night or early Thursday, according to the NHC.

Beryl has already left a trail of death with at least three people killed in Grenada, where the storm made landfall Monday, as well as one in St Vincent and the Grenadines and three in Venezuela. Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell said the island of Carriacou, which was struck by the eye of the storm, has been all but cut off, with houses, telecommunica-

tions and fuel facilities there flattened. "We've had virtually no communication with Carriacou in the last 12 hours except briefly this morning by satellite phone," Mitchell told a news conference. The 13.5-square mile (35-square kilometer) island is home to around 9,000 people. At least two people there died, Mitchell said, with a third killed on the country's main island of Grenada when a tree fell on a house. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, one person on the island of Bequia was reported dead from the storm, and a man died in Venezuela's northeastern coastal state of Sucre when he was swept away by a flooded river, officials there said. —AFP



## International

# Labour predicted to eject Tories in UK polls as leaders make final push

## Starmer's 'change' agenda promises cautious management of country's economy

LONDON: Britain's political leaders made a final push for votes Wednesday on the last day of an election campaign expected to return a Labour government after 14 years of Conservative rule.

Ex-premier Boris Johnson staged an 11th-hour rallying call for the flagging Tories but an ally of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak conceded their party was staring at an "extraordinary landslide" defeat. Voters will cast ballots from 7 am (0600 GMT) on Thursday, with polls predicting that Labour will



Labour Party leader Keir Starmer speaks during a live TV debate, hosted by The BBC, in Nottingham.

win its first general election since 2005 - making its leader Keir Starmer prime minister.

That outcome would see Britain swing leftwards back to the centre ground after almost a decade and a half of right-wing Conservative governments. Starmer was criss-crossing the UK on Wednesday with visits in England, Scotland and Wales in a bid to

shore up Labour support and warn against complacency in the campaign's final hours.

"If you want change, you have to vote for it," the 61-year-old told reporters, adding that he was "not taking anything for granted". The Tories have been going all out to play upon people's fears, warning of tax rises and weaker national security if they are voted out, in what Labour sees as a desperate last stand to cling on to power.

They have also increasingly urged voters in recent weeks to stop the prospect of Labour winning a "supermajority" - a claim Labour fears is intended to hit turnout. Work and Pensions Secretary Mel Stride, one of Sunak's closest allies, said Wednesday the electorate would "regret" handing Labour "untrammelled" power without an effective Tory opposition.

"If you look at the polls, it is pretty clear that Labour at this stage are heading for an extraordinary landslide on a scale that has probably never, ever been seen in this country before," he told right-wing broadcaster GB News. Labour has enjoyed a consistent 20-point lead in the polls over the past two years with many voters dissatisfied at the Conservatives' handling of a range of issues including the cost of living, public services, immigration and the economy.

But Johnson - ousted by his own colleagues, including Sunak, in 2022 after a string of scandals, and who has been notably absent from the campaign - urged supporters not to see the result as a "foregone conclusion". The Brexit stalwart told a rally late Tuesday that Starmer would try to "usher in the most left-wing Labour government" since World War II.

Earlier, Survation pollsters predicted Labour was on



WINCHESTER: Britain's Liberal Democrat party leader Ed Davey smiles during a visit to the Winchester Abbey gardens, in south England, on July 3, 2024. — AFP photos

track to win more than the 418 seats it won when Tony Blair ended 18 years of Conservative rule in 1997.

Labour requires at least 326 seats to secure a majority. "There is more chance of lightning striking twice in the same place... than Rishi Sunak remaining as prime minister," Britain's pre-eminent political polling expert John Curtice said this week.

Attention in the British media is turning to what a Starmer government would look like when the results

for the 650-seat parliament start dropping from about 2230 GMT on Thursday into Friday morning. Thursday's vote is Britain's first July election since 1945, when Labour under Clement Attlee defeated the Conservatives of World War II leader Winston Churchill, ushering in a period of transformational social change. Attlee's government created the modern welfare state, including the National Health Service, Britain's most cherished institution after the royal family. — AFP

## 120,000 'stolen' babies: Georgia's trafficking scandal

TBILISI, Georgia: Georgian student Elene Deisadze was browsing TikTok in 2022 when she stumbled across the profile of a girl, Anna Panchulidze, who looked exactly like her. Months later, after chatting and becoming friends, they both separately learnt they were adopted, and last year decided to take a DNA test. It revealed they were not only related, but identical twins.

"I had a happy childhood, but now my entire past felt like a deception," Anna, an English student at university, told AFP. Far from an innocent case of separation at birth, the sisters are among tens of thousands of Georgian children who were illegally sold in a decades-long baby trafficking scandal.

The scheme, uncovered by journalists and families searching for lost relatives, saw babies stolen from their mothers - many of whom were told they had died - and then sold to adoptive parents in Georgia and abroad. Journalists have found that the illegal adoptions took place over more than 50 years, orchestrated by a network of maternity hospitals, nurseries and adoption agencies that colluded to take the children from their parents, falsify birth records, and place them with new families in exchange for cash.

Elene and Anna, now 19, began unraveling their hid-

den past two years ago. "We became friends without suspecting we might be sisters, but both of us felt there was some special bond between us," Elene, a psychology student, told AFP. Last summer, both of their parents independently told the girls they had been adopted - revelations they had long planned to make.

It was then that the pair decided to take the genetic test that would reveal they were identical twins. "I struggled to process the information, to accept the new reality - the people who had raised me for 18 years are not my parents," said Anna. "But I feel no anger whatsoever, only immense gratitude to the people who raised me, and joy at finding my flesh and blood," she added.

The test for Elene and Anna was arranged with the help of Georgian journalist Tamuna Museridze, who runs a Facebook group dedicated to reuniting babies stolen from their parents. It has over 200,000 members - including mothers who were told by hospital staff that their babies had died shortly after being born, but then discovered years later they might be alive. Museridze set up the group in 2021 in a bid to find her own family after learning she had been adopted. She soon uncovered the mass baby-selling operation.

"Mothers were told their babies had died shortly after birth and were buried at a hospital cemetery," Museridze said. "In fact, hospitals had no cemeteries, and babies were being secretly whisked away and sold to adoptive parents." The new parents were often unaware the adoptions were illegal and told fabricated stories about the circumstances. "Some people, however, consciously chose to circumvent the law and buy a baby" to avoid decade-long waiting lists, Museridze told AFP.



TBILISI: Georgian twin sisters Anna Panchulidze (left), an English student at university, and Elene Deisadze (right), a psychology student, and Elene's adoptive mother, Lia Korkotadze, pose during an interview in Tbilisi on March 23, 2024. — AFP

She says she has evidence that at least 120,000 babies "were stolen from their parents and sold" between 1950 and 2006, when anti-trafficking measures by reformist president Mikheil Saakashvili eventually quashed the scheme. In Georgia, new parents would pay the equivalent of many months' salary to arrange the adoption, while babies trafficked

abroad were sold for up to \$30,000, Museridze said. Elene's adoptive mother, Lia Korkotadze, decided with her husband to adopt after learning they couldn't have children a year into their marriage. "But adopting from an orphanage seemed virtually impossible due to incredibly long waiting lists," the 61-year-old economist told AFP. — AFP



GAZA: A bicycle is ridden past mounds of garbage and sewage in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood, north of Gaza City, on July 3, 2024. — AFP

## Zionist massacres rock Gaza...

Continued from Page 1

Katyusha rockets". The militant group also claimed another retaliatory attack with "Falaq rockets" on a base in the Zionist entity's north.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a US media report saying his generals were urging a Gaza truce even with Hamas undefeated, stressing on Tuesday that "this will not happen". The United Nations warned that the almost nine-month-old Gaza war had "unleashed a maelstrom of human misery" and that the latest evacuation order had plunged yet more Palestinians into "an abyss of suffering".

Ten days after Netanyahu said the war's "intense phase" was winding down, the Zionist military again rained down air strikes and artillery fire on militants in the Shujaia district. Thousands have fled the fighting in Shujaia, among them Umm Bashar Al-Jamal, 42, who was now sheltering in Gaza City's Yarmouk sports stadium. "We were displaced five days ago," she said. "We fled from Shujaia. We woke up to the sound of tanks. The houses were bulldozed. All our homes!"

The Zionist army - which issued an evacuation order for Shujaia a week ago - on Monday did the same for a larger area near Khan Yunis and Rafah in the south, raising fears of renewed heavy battles there. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have again taken to the road, many bundling their scant belongings on top of cars or donkey carts as they sought safety elsewhere in the bombed-out waste land.

The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said 250,000 people had been affected by the latest evacuation order that covers southern areas bordering the Zionist entity and Egypt. Almost all patients in the European Gaza Hospital and the Red Cross field hospital decided to flee following the evacuation order, the World Health Organization said.

Though the European Gaza Hospital itself is not under evacuation instructions, the order has impacted operations. "Now only three patients remain at the European Gaza Hospital and three at the ICRC field hospital," the WHO said, citing figures from Tuesday. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the southern evacuation order covers 117 sq km, "making it the largest such order since October".

The UN humanitarian coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that the war had now displaced 80 percent of Gaza's population. She also said not enough aid was reaching the besieged territory and that crossings must be reopened, particularly to southern Gaza, to avert a humanitarian disaster. "Palestinian civilians in Gaza have been plunged into an abyss of suffering, their home lives shattered, their lives upended," she said. "The war has not merely created the most profound of humanitarian crises. It has unleashed a maelstrom of human misery."

The Zionist offensive has killed at least 37,953 people, mostly women and children, according to figures from Gaza's health ministry. The Gaza civil defense agency said seven people were killed when a strike hit a family house north of Gaza City. Another strike killed three people in a car at Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Deir al-Balah area, an AFP reporter said. — Agencies

## Putin, Xi vie for influence at...

Continued from Page 1

Both countries have railed against what they call US-led "hegemony" on the world stage and are trying to advance rival regional groups and alliances to push back against Western influence in regions they see as their backyards.

Putin said Wednesday that the SCO was "strengthening its role as one of the key pillars of a fair multipolar world order," using language characteristic of how Moscow bashes the West. Ahead of the gathering, China's foreign ministry said the summit would "make contributions to promoting security, stability and development of member countries", and advance "lasting peace and common prosperity in the world".

China's Xi said Moscow and Beijing needed to continue developing relations despite difficult global circumstances. "In the face of the turbulent international situation and external environment, the two sides should continue to uphold the original aspiration of friendship for generations to come," Xi told Putin in brief opening remarks.

Despite inking a "no limits" strategic partnership just days before Russia invaded Ukraine, Moscow and Beijing have been rivals for influence in the Central Asian region. The five countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - are ex-Soviet republics and have historic cultural, linguistic and economic ties to Russia.

But China's rising economic power and sprawling investment has challenged Russian influence. Central Asia, key to China's flagship Belt and Road infrastructure project, is rich in natural resources and crucial for the overland transport of goods between China and Europe. Russia's war on Ukraine has also been seen as creating an opening for other powers to swoop into regions that have been traditionally aligned with Moscow.

The ultra-closed Turkmenistan is not a member of the SCO, but the four other Central Asian states are, alongside India, Iran and Pakistan. The nine-member bloc is complemented by 14 "dialogue partners", such as Turkey and several Gulf states. Putin also met Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of the summit. The NATO member, which is positioning itself as a possible mediator in the Ukraine war, is a key trade and finance center for Moscow, which faces heavy Western sanctions. — AFP

## Biden under pressure as...

Continued from Page 1

would fare better under a new leader, according to a CNN survey. It wasn't until Tuesday - five days after the debate - that Biden called House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, and congressional staffers have been voicing consternation over the glacial pace of the outreach. "We are getting to the point where it may not have been the debate that did him in, but the aftermath of how they've handled it," a senior Democratic operative told Washington political outlet Axios.

Biden's press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre acknowledged Tuesday that he had a "bad night" and was fending off a cold - but flatly denied that he was dealing with dementia and other any other illness. Aware of growing alarm in the party, Biden scheduled a White House meeting with all 23 Democratic governors on Wednesday evening. He will make his pitch in the swing states of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania in the coming days, and sit with ABC News on Friday for his first interview since the debate.

The president has cited fatigue as a new explanation for his poor showing, saying that he had been unwise to travel "around the world a couple times" before the debate and "almost fell asleep on stage". But he had been back in the United States for nearly two weeks and spent two days relaxing and six in debate preparation. The Times said people who have interacted with the president had found that his mental foggiest was "growing more frequent, more pronounced and more worrisome".

Democratic lawmakers have begun to go public with their doubts, with two saying Tuesday they expected Biden to lose to Trump in November and another calling for him to quit the White House race. Big names in the House of Representatives who are usually foursquare behind Biden - including Nancy Pelosi and James Clyburn - have acknowledged that questions over his condition are fair.

House Democrats vented their frustration during a video call on Tuesday, although some reportedly cautioned against changing leaders so close to the August nominating convention. "The fundamental issue, of course, isn't the campaign. It's not the Biden family. And it's not even last week's debate," political analyst and prominent Trump critic Bill Kristol wrote Wednesday for conservative outlet The Bulwark. "It's the fitness of the president to be president - not for a few more months, but for four more years." — AFP



## International

# Terror, 'chaos' as India's deadliest stampede in a decade kills 121

## Survivors recall the horror of being crushed

**HATHRAS, India:** Survivors of India's deadliest stampede in more than a decade recalled on Wednesday the horror of being crushed at a vastly overcrowded religious gathering where 121 people were killed. A police report said more than 250,000 people attended the event in northern India's Uttar Pradesh state, more than triple the 80,000 for whom organizers had permission. Discarded clothing and lost shoes were scattered across the muddy site, an open field alongside a highway, where popular preacher Bhole Baba had held a sermon. People fell on top of each other as they tumbled down a slope into a water-logged ditch, witnesses said.

"Everyone - the entire crowd, including women and children - all left from the event site at once," said police officer Sheela Maurya, 50, who had been on duty at the ceremony on Tuesday. "There wasn't enough space, and everyone just fell on top of each other." The state disaster management centre said 121 people had been killed. Almost all were women. Officials initially blamed a dust storm for sparking panic, while police later said the stampede began when "followers started to collect earth" from the ground where the preacher had passed.

### 'Organizers pushed them'

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath flew in by helicopter to visit the dozens of injured. "These type of incidents are not just accidents", he told reporters, dressed in his flowing saffron robes as he is also a Hindu monk. He said a judicial inquiry will be held.

Yogi said crowds followed Baba's convoy as he left the site. "As his cavalcade moved forward, a group of women approached him to touch him," he said. "A crowd followed and then they fell on each other. The organizers pushed them around... that's why it happened." Police said they were seeking the organizers to question them, but the whereabouts of preacher Baba are not known.

### 'Crushed'

Maurya, who had been on duty since early morning on Tuesday in the sweltering, humid heat at the



**KASGANJ, India:** Sudha (center), mother of a victim who died in a stampede during a sermon in Hathras of India's Uttar Pradesh state, mourns at her residence in Kasganj on July 3, 2024. - AFP

preacher's ceremony, was among the injured. "I tried to help some women but even I fainted and was crushed under the crowd," she told AFP. Deadly incidents are common at places of worship during major religious festivals in India, the biggest of which prompt millions of devotees to make pilgrimages to holy sites.

"The main highway next to the field was packed with people and vehicles for kilometers, there were far too many people here," said Hori Lal, 45, who lives in Phulrai Mughalgadi village, near the site of the stampede. "Once people started falling to the side and getting crushed, there was just chaos."

### 'Heart-rending'

Four unidentified bodies lay on the floor of a makeshift morgue at the hospital in the nearby town of Hathras at dawn on Wednesday. Ram Nivas, 35, a farmer, said he was searching for his sister-in-law Rumla, 54, who was missing after the crush.

"We haven't been able to find her anywhere," Nivas said after he had visited all the nearby hospitals throughout the night. "We just hope she's still alive," he said quietly. "Maybe just lost." In the hospital's emergency ward, Sandeep Kumar, 29, sat beside his injured sister, Shikha Kumar, 22. "Everyone wanted to exit quickly, and that is what led to the stampede," Sandeep said.

"She saw people fainting, getting crushed." Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced compensation of \$2,400 for the next of kin of those killed and \$600 for those injured in the "tragic incident". President Droupadi Murmu said the deaths were "heart-rending". Religious gatherings in India have a grim track record of deadly incidents caused by poor crowd management and safety lapses. In 2008, 224 pilgrims were killed and more than 400 were injured in a stampede at a hilltop temple in the northern city of Jodhpur. - AFP

## Taliban discussed prisoner exchange with US: Afghan govt

**KABUL:** Two American prisoners were being held in custody in Afghanistan, a Taliban government spokesman said Wednesday, and an "exchange" for Afghans held in Guantanamo Bay had been discussed with the United States. Zabihullah Mujahid did not name the US prisoners, but an American woman was among more than a dozen staff of an international NGO arrested by Taliban authorities last September, and aid worker Ryan Corbett has been in custody since 2022.

"We should be able to free our citizens in (an) exchange, as American citizens are important for them (the United States), just as Afghans are important for us," Mujahid told a press conference in Kabul.

He said discussions over a prisoner exchange were held with US representatives during United Nations-led talks in Qatar. The talks, which gathered UN officials, Taliban authorities and the special envoys to Afghanistan, ended on Monday. "Two American citizens are imprisoned in Afghanistan," Mujahid told the press conference, adding that Afghan prisoners were also held in the United States, including in the secretive US prison in Cuba.

"We have had discussions on their release with them (the United States) before. Afghanistan's conditions should be accepted," he said. An American woman was among at least 18 staff of non-governmental organization International Assistance Mission (IAM) detained on accusations of carrying out Christian missionary work. The UN in June warned Corbett's "life could be at risk" and called for Taliban authorities to give him "immediate access to medical treatment for his deteriorating health".

## Chad rangers battle to protect park from poachers, local farmers

**BINDER, Chad:** Between the orange trunks of the acacia trees in the Chad savannah, a herd of elephants move through Zah Soo National Park, under the watchful eye of one of the only humans allowed to witness the scene. Established to protect the Sahel country's biodiversity from the threat of poaching and effects of agriculture, the park faces increasing criticism from local farmers who say it has affected their livelihoods. Observing the elephants with a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder, Belfort Assia Blanga, a member of the Forest and Wildlife Guard (GFF) pointed out that the herd now has just as many juveniles as adults. "The fact that they are reproducing shows that they now feel secure," the ranger said - a point of pride for the park's custodians, after 113 elephants were killed between 2013 and 2019.

The park, along the border with neighboring Cameroon, is now home to 125 elephants - the country's third largest population. Since the deployment of the GFF rangers, no elephants have been poached despite their limited resources, a lack of ammunition and "worn-out weapons", Assia Blanga added. But other species in the park are still threatened by illegal hunting. Lambert Worgue Yemye, deputy director of the protected area, said that villagers and farmers mainly target antelope.

The 815-kilometre-squared (315 miles-squared) park was created as a result of a 15-year partnership



**KABUL:** Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid (left) leaves after attending a press conference in Kabul on July 3, 2024, following the third Doha meeting. - AFP

Dozens of foreigners have been detained by the Taliban authorities since the group's return to power in August 2021. Many countries, including the United States, warn against citizens travelling to Afghanistan, citing risks of wrongful detention, violence and kidnapping. At least one Afghan prisoner remains in detention at Guantanamo Bay, Muhammad Rahim, whose family called for his release in November.

In February, two former prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay until 2017 were welcomed home to Afghanistan, more than 20 years after they were arrested. Abdul Karim and Abdul Zahir had been transferred to Oman and held under house arrest until their release. They were among hundreds of suspected militants captured by US forces and held in Guantanamo Bay. US authorities faced accusations of torture and abuse against prisoners at the facility, where many were held without charge or the legal power to challenge their detention. Most of the military prison's inmates have been released over the years, including senior Taliban leaders. The US government has said for years it is working to reduce the number of detainees and eventually shut down Guantanamo Bay, which lies on the island of Cuba but is under US jurisdiction. - AFP



**BINDER, Chad:** Eco-guards train near the anti-poaching base of the Zah Soo National Park, in Binder, West Mayo-Kebbi. - AFP

between the Chadian government and French biodiversity conservation NGO Noe. As well as poaching, the park's rangers have to fight against herders illegally taking their herds to graze in Zah Soo.

Cattle raising is the main economic activity of the Mayo-Kebbi West region where the park is located. The seasonal movement of large and small livestock from nearby Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria has a devastating impact on biodiversity in Zah Soo, according to Noe. "The cattle graze on everything they can find without lifting their heads. When they pass through, they also destroy the flora by trampling on it," said Worgue Yemye. To stop this, the park has been impounding stray livestock herds that have made their way into the park.

Since last year, more than 2,600 cattle have been taken to the eight enclosures set up in the prefectures bordering the park. Raising awareness and cracking down on the problem have reduced the number of an-

## Who is 'Bhole Baba', preacher at centre of stampede disaster?

**NEW DELHI:** A massive gathering addressed by an Indian policeman-turned-preacher, considered an incarnation of God by his followers, turned horribly wrong on Tuesday, as at least 121 people, mostly women and children, died in a stampede. "Bhole Baba", or the Innocent Elder, is the sobriquet of a self-styled godman who was a police constable before he turned to spirituality and became a preacher. Originally Suraj Pal Singh, he later changed his name to Narayan Sakar Hari. He is currently untraceable, and police in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where Tuesday's tragedy occurred, said they were still trying to trace him.

Here are some known facts about the preacher: Bhole Baba was a police constable in Uttar Pradesh for nearly a decade before he resigned and turned to spirituality. Sudhir Kumar, a senior police official said. The preacher is a native of Kasganj village, close to the Hathras area where the stampede took place. He used to travel across the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, in India's northern belt, where he has a huge following, and address gatherings, mostly on the first Tuesday of every month, local media said.

A member of India's low-caste Dalit community, Bhole Baba's aim was to create an ideal society, free of superstition and full of compassion, according to a hoarding erected at the site of Tuesday's incident.

Posters and videos posted on Bhole Baba's YouTube channel, which boasts of millions of views, show him dressed in either traditional Indian kurta tunics or pristine white suits and ties, often sporting sunglasses, a departure from the spartan image of most godmen. - Reuters

### News in Brief

#### Taiwan: China military drone spotted near island airport

**TAIPEI:** A Chinese military drone hovered near an airport on a remote Taiwan island causing delays to flights, Taipei's military and local media said Wednesday. Liberty Times said the drone was spotted around five nautical miles (9.3 kilometers) from Matsu's Nangan Airport on Tuesday, and it stayed around for about 20 minutes. Beijing claims democratic Taiwan as its own territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the self-ruled island under its control. In addition to military pressure from Chinese warplanes and vessels that maintain a near-daily presence around the island, Taiwan has faced incursions from civilian and unidentified drones that surveil and harass troops. - AFP

#### Germany, Sweden arrest 8 over Syria crimes against humanity

**BERLIN:** Investigators in Germany and Sweden on Wednesday arrested eight suspects allied with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's government over alleged participation in crimes against humanity in Syria, prosecutors in both countries said. The suspects are accused of taking part in a "violent crackdown on a peaceful anti-government protest" in the Al-Yarmouk district in Damascus on July 13, 2012. Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor's Office said. It said the four stateless Syrian Palestinians and Syrian national detained in Germany were "strongly suspected of killing and attempting to kill civilians, qualified as crimes against humanity and war crimes". - AFP

#### Belarus frees 'some political prisoners': Exiled oppn leader

**WARSAW:** Belarus on Wednesday freed several political prisoners, exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said, a day after President Alexander Lukashenko said he may offer an amnesty to some political detainees with serious illnesses. Lukashenko, who will mark 30 years as president later this month, has locked up hundreds of political opponents, activists and journalists throughout his rule, while thousands more have fled abroad. "Today we witnessed the first cases of some political prisoners being released in Belarus," Tikhanovskaya said in a post on X, without saying how many or who had been released. - AFP

#### Russia says Romanian embassy employee 'persona non grata'

**MOSCOW:** Russia's foreign ministry said on Wednesday it had summoned Romania's ambassador in Moscow and declared one Romanian embassy official "persona non grata". In a statement cited by news portal Agerpres, the Romanian foreign ministry called Russia's decision "unfounded in relation to the provisions of the Vienna Convention of 1961 on diplomatic relations". The Romanian foreign ministry said the Russian decision was in response to Bucharest declaring a Russian diplomat "persona non grata" in May. - Reuters

#### Three dead, three missing after boat capsizes off Portugal coast

**LISBON:** Three people died and three were missing on Wednesday after a fishing boat with 17 crew members on board capsized off central Portugal's Atlantic coast, the maritime authority said. "So far, 11 people have been rescued alive and three have been found lifeless," the maritime authority said in a statement. "Search operations for the three missing people are underway." Port captain Pedro Cervantes Costa told reporters most of the crew members were Portuguese. Two Indonesian nationals were among those rescued alive. Authorities were alerted to the incident at around 4.30 am local time and emergency

## Woman found dead inside a python in Indonesia

**MAKASSAR, Indonesia:** A woman was found dead inside the belly of a snake after it swallowed her whole in central Indonesia, police said Wednesday, the second python killing in the province in a month.

Siriati, 36, had gone missing after she left her house Tuesday morning to buy medicine for her sick child, police said, prompting relatives to launch a search.

Her husband Adiansa, 30, found her slippers and pants on the ground about 500 metres (yards) from their house in Siteba village, South Sulawesi province.

"Shortly after that, he spotted a snake, about 10 metres from the path. The snake was still alive," local police chief Idul, who like many Indonesians has one name, told AFP.

Village secretary Iyang told AFP that Adiansa became suspicious after he noticed the python's "very large" belly. He called the villagers to help cut open its stomach, where they found her body. - AFP



THURSDAY, JULY 4, 2024

# US weekly jobless claims rise as labor market slows

## Trade deficit widens for a second straight month in May

WASHINGTON: First-time applications for US unemployment benefits increased last week, while the number of people on jobless rolls rose further to a 2-1/2 year high towards the end of June, consistent with a gradual cooling in the labor market. Ebbing labor market momentum, together with abating inflation pressures, keep the Federal Reserve on track to start cutting interest rates this year, with financial markets hopeful that the easing cycle could start in September.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said on Tuesday that the economy was back on a "disinflationary path," but stressed policymakers needed more data before cutting rates. "The labor market is still historically strong, but not quite as strong as it was in 2022 and early 2023," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits rose 4,000 to a seasonally adjusted 238,000 for the week ended June 29, the Labor Department said on Wednesday. The report was released a day early because of the Independence Day holiday on Thursday. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 235,000 claims in the latest week. Unadjusted claims increased 13,049 to 238,149. There was a 4,509 jump in applications in New York, likely related to school holidays. Notable increases were also reported in California, New Jersey, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky and Michigan. These more than offset declines in Connecticut and Maryland. Claims have moved to the upper end of their 194,000-243,000 range of this year, in part because of a rise in layoffs as higher interest rates dampen demand as well as difficulties adjusting the data for seasonal fluctuations during holidays.

Volatility could persist after the July 4 holiday. Auto manufacturers typically idle assembly plants for retooling in the summer, but the timing is uncertain. The labor market is steadily cooling, with the government reporting on Tuesday that there were 1.22 job openings for every unemployed person in May. The vacancy-to-unemployment ratio is close to its average of 1.19 in 2019.

Separately on Wednesday, the ADP Employment report showed private payrolls increased by 150,000 jobs in June after rising 157,000 in May. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast private employment increasing by 160,000. The US central bank has maintained its benchmark overnight interest rate in the current 5.25 percent-5.50 percent range since last July. The Fed has hiked its policy rate by 525 basis points since 2022 to stamp out inflation.

The number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid, a proxy for hiring, increased 26,000 to a seasonally adjusted 1.858 million during the week ending June 22, the highest level since late November 2021, the claims report showed. The so-called continuing claims data have been boosted by a policy change in Minnesota that came into effect last year allowing non-teaching educational staff to file for unemployment benefits during the summer break.

Meanwhile, the US trade deficit widened for a second straight month in May amid a decline in exports, indicating that trade likely remained a drag on economic growth in the second quarter.

The trade deficit increased 0.8 percent to \$75.1 billion, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said on Wednesday. Data for April was revised slightly to show the trade gap rising to \$74.5 billion instead of \$74.6 billion as previously reported. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the deficit increasing to \$76.2 billion in May.

The goods trade deficit widened 0.9 percent to \$100.2 billion, the highest since May 2022. Adjusted for inflation, the goods trade deficit rose 0.5 percent to \$94.5 billion. Trade subtracted from gross domestic product in the first quarter, restricting the economy to a 1.4 percent annualized growth pace. The economy grew at a 3.4 percent pace in the October-December quarter. Growth estimates for the second quarter are around a 2 percent pace.

Exports slipped 0.7 percent to \$261.7 billion in



SAN RAFAEL, US: Home Depot customers walk by a posted now hiring sign in San Rafael, California. Private sector employment cooled unexpectedly in June, payroll firm ADP said on July 3, 2024, with job creation slowing for a third month. -- AFP

May, reflecting a strong dollar as the Federal Reserve keeps interest rates higher, and slowing global demand. Goods exports plunged 1.7 percent to \$169.6 billion. There were decreases in exports of industrial supplies and materials, mostly nonmonetary gold, other petroleum products and fuel oil. Exports of automotive vehicles, parts and engines also fell.

Services exports rose \$1.1 billion to \$92.1 billion, boosted by travel. Imports fell 0.3 percent to \$336.7 billion. Goods imports declined 0.8 percent to \$269.7

billion. There were declines in imports of consumer goods, which were pulled down by pharmaceutical preparations. Imports of cell phones and other household goods, however, increased \$1.0 billion.

Automotive vehicles, parts and engines imports fell \$1.5 billion. But imports of industrial supplies and materials increased \$1.4 billion, boosted by crude oil and nuclear fuel materials. Imports of services increased \$0.9 billion to \$67.0 billion, lifted by transport and travel. -- Reuters

## China supports Kazakhstan joining BRICS, says Xi

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping said he supports Kazakhstan joining the BRICS bloc, Chinese state media reported on Wednesday, as the group of developing nations mulls further expansion to rival a Western-dominated world order it sees as outdated.

Speaking to the press alongside Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev following a meeting in the Central Asian state's capital, Xi encouraged Kazakhstan to "play the role of a middle power on the international stage and make its due contribution to global governance", while endorsing Astana's accession. China and Russia are pushing for the ex-

pansion of the BRICS grouping, which also includes Brazil, India and South Africa, as they seek to counter Western economic dominance.

Originally an acronym coined by Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O'Neill in 2001, the bloc was founded as an informal four-nation club in 2009 and added South Africa a year later. Last August, the BRICS bloc agreed to admit Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. However, Saudi Arabia has not yet joined the group. Argentina had planned to join BRICS, but President Javier Milei withdrew his country soon after taking office in December.

Xi is in Kazakhstan to attend a heads of state meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from July 3-4. During his meeting with Tokayev, China and Kazakhstan also agreed to double their two-way trade as soon as possible and deepen cooperation in oil and gas exploration, extraction and processing, the report added.

Crude oil and petroleum gases made up the bulk

of Kazakhstan's exports to China last year, according to United Nations COMTRADE data, with outbound shipments to the world's No.2 economy worth \$3.8 billion and \$1.5 billion, respectively. As such, Xi and Tokayev agreed to take measures to ensure the long-term, safe and stable operation of the crude oil pipeline running between their respective countries and the Kazakhstan section of the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline running from China's Xinjiang region to Turkmenistan, the report said.

The two leaders also pledged to strengthen cooperation in clean energy, including wind, solar and nuclear power, with Chinese companies stepping in to help upgrade Kazakhstan's energy grid and power stations. Chinese firms have invested \$9.5 billion in Kazakhstan since Xi first proposed his flagship Belt and Road Initiative during a state visit in 2013, data from the American Enterprise Institute think tank shows, almost all of which has been in the state's petroleum or nuclear energy industries. -- Reuters

## Indonesia launches first EV battery plant

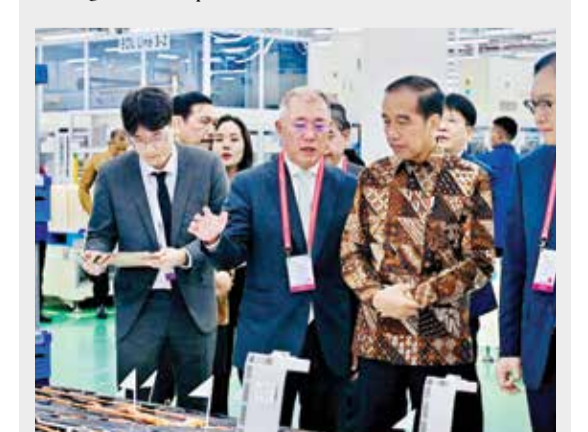
JAKARTA: Indonesia launched its first electric vehicle battery plant on Wednesday, President Joko Widodo said, as Southeast Asian countries move to gain a foothold in the emerging industry. The country, which is the region's largest economy and home to the largest nickel reserve in the world, has been seeking to position itself as a key player in the global electric vehicle supply chain.

The plant is a joint venture between South Korean manufacturers Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solution (LGES) and can produce up to 10 Gigawatt hours (GWh) of battery cells every year.

Widodo said the plant, located in West Javan town of Karawang, was "the biggest in Southeast Asia". Its opening marked "a new chapter" that underscored the resource-rich nation's ambition to become a global player in the electric vehicle supply chain, Widodo said at the launch. "We have abundant natural resources, but for decades we only exported it in the form of raw materials without added value," he said.

"But now with smelters being built, with the electric vehicle battery cell being built, we will become an important global player in the global supply chain for electric vehicles." The plant is part of a \$9.8 billion electric vehicle battery deal signed between Indonesia and LG in 2020. It will produce batteries for Hyundai's electric vehicles, with 50,000 of its Kona Electric SUV expected to be powered by the Indonesian-made battery. Joint venture company PT HLI Green Power is expected to spend \$2 billion to raise the plant's capacity to 20 GWh.

Hyundai Motor Group executive chairman Euisun Chung said that Indonesia's electric vehicle industry would create new economic opportunities. "This country is the biggest automotive market in Southeast Asia. The vehicles that are produced and sold here are the standard for the Southeast Asian region with 700 million potential customers," he said through an interpreter. --AFP



KARAWANG, Indonesia: Indonesian President Joko Widodo (centre right) speaks with Hyundai Motor Group Executive Chairman Chung Euisun (center) during an inspection of the battery and electric vehicle manufacturing plant in Karawang, West Java. -- AFP



ASTANA: In this handout picture released by Kazakhstan's presidential press service on July 3, 2024, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, visiting China's President Xi Jinping and members of both delegations hold talks in Astana. -- AFP

## EU countries wavering on China EV tariffs

BRUSSELS/LONDON: EU countries are wavering over whether to back additional tariffs on Chinese-built electric vehicles, highlighting Brussels' challenge in building support for its largest trade case yet as Beijing threatens wide-ranging retaliation. Germany, whose carmakers made a third of their sales last year in China, wants to stop the tariffs, according to a government source, while France has been among the firmest backers. But a majority of countries are still weighing the pros and cons of the escalating trade spat, according to an informal poll by Reuters of EU governments.

The issue will be put to members in an advisory vote in the coming weeks, the first official test of support in a landmark case for the Commission. The EU initiated the probe without an industry complaint, the first such trade case of this kind. The bloc is set to confirm on Thursday provisional duties of up to 37.6 percent on Chinese brands such as BYD and SAIC, as well as on China-made models of Tesla and other western automakers. Carmakers are bracing for billions of dollars in new costs as a result, which analysts say could slow

their European expansion. EU members will also vote in October if the Commission proposes multi-year tariffs at the end of its investigation. These would be blocked if a "qualified majority" of at least 15 countries representing 65 percent of the EU population votes against them.

France, Italy and Spain, with 40 percent of the EU population, have indicated they would back tariffs.

"Europe must defend itself if our companies are harmed and do not compete on equal terms," Spain's economy ministry said. However, the Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland and Poland were still debating the issue, official and government sources said, while Belgium has a caretaker government and the Dutch only got a government this week. Germany has stressed the need for a negotiated solution with Beijing. Its automakers have said tariffs are the wrong approach, with the negative effects outweighing any benefits. In a last-ditch effort to influence negotiation, its auto association on Wednesday urged Brussels to drop the tariffs.

Increasing the cost of EVs for consumers undermines the EU's goal of being carbon-neutral by 2050, opponents say. Tesla has said it will hike prices. Beijing's retaliation could bring extra tariffs on EU exports of cognac, pork or luxury cars. The Commission says duties are needed to counter cheap loans, land and raw materials and other subsidies and the goal is a level playing field, not shutting Chinese car makers out, as the United States' planned 100 percent tariff is likely to do. Tariffs could also give the EU leverage in nego-

tiations with Beijing and push producers to make cars in the EU. Hosuk Lee-Makiyama, director of think-tank the European Centre for International Political Economy, said clear majorities either way could embolden tariff opponents or supporters. He added final positions at the end of the investigation will depend on what Beijing offers in negotiations.

"If we go to a vote then, it means negotiations have failed," he said. The EV investigation could just be the start for the EU as it toughens its stance on Beijing, as its green and tech companies trail global rivals, interviews with half a dozen trade experts show.

They point to a 712-page updated report on Chinese state interference and subsidies released in April as the strongest sign yet that Brussels means business. The document is by far the most extensive undertaken by the Commission, showing it has learned a lesson from an investigation into Chinese solar panels a decade ago, when it did not impose tariffs and the EU's own industry collapsed. It offers evidence to back its assertions that China does not play by the same rules and includes research into a wider range of industries, beyond traditional ones such as steel, including semiconductors, telecom equipment and renewable energy. That leaves the door open to future cases. "This is a report to set the scene and show how and why Europe is changing its policies," said Alicia Garcia Herrero, a senior fellow at Brussels-based economic think-tank Bruegel. --Reuters



## Business

# EU clears Lufthansa's proposed ITA Airways stake with conditions

## Italy calls the deal a 'big European success'

**BRUSSELS:** The EU's powerful competition regulator on Wednesday announced it has conditionally approved German airline Lufthansa's proposed stake in ITA Airways, a deal that Italy called a "big European success". Lufthansa, one of Europe's largest carriers, last year agreed to pay 325 million euros (\$350 million) for a 41 percent stake in ITA, with the Italian finance ministry also contributing 250 million euros as part of the capital increase. The deal provided the German airline various options to increase its stake in ITA Airways - the successor to state-owned Alitalia - or acquire it outright at a later date.

But it has faced a turbulent process to get regulators' approval after the European Commission opened an in-depth probe in January, fearing it could hurt competition. The commission has now given the green light after Lufthansa and the Italian government offered a package of commitments to assuage those concerns.

"Despite the comprehensive and far-reaching concessions, the invest-

ment in ITA Airways strengthens the Lufthansa Group's position in global competition," Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr said in a statement. "This positive conclusion is truly a success," Italian Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti told a press conference in Rome. "It has been a complicated, troubled, difficult path, but... it is a big Italian success, it is a big German success, it is a big European success," Giorgetti said.

The offered remedies that helped seal the deal include making it possible for one or two rival airlines to launch non-stop flights between Rome and Milan and central Europe, the commission said.

"These commitments fully address the competition concerns identified by the commission," it said. "The decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments." Take-off and landing slots at Milan's Linate airport will also be transferred to competing airlines for short-haul routes. Other commitments to fulfill include entering into agreements with rivals "to improve their competitiveness on the long-



PARIS: This combination of file pictures shows a Lufthansa Boeing 747 taking off overhead at the airport in Frankfurt am Main and an Airbus A319-112 bearing the ITA Airways livery taking off from Rome's Fiumicino airport. — AFP

haul routes of concern", between Italy and the United States and Canada.

This could include slot swaps at airports or interlining agreements, which means airlines coordinate with each other on certain aspects of travel, such as ticketing. "This will lead to increased frequencies of non-stop flights and/or improved connections

for one-stop flights on each of the routes," the commission said. ITA Airways was created from the ashes of Alitalia, which was placed under public administration in 2017. Alitalia had accumulated losses of 11.4 billion euros between 2000 and 2020. It was eventually shut down in October 2021 before a rebirth as ITA. The EU wanted to

make sure the Lufthansa deal did not lead to higher prices for consumers. Brussels had been concerned that on a number of short-haul routes between Italy and central Europe as well as long-haul routes between the United States and Canada there would be limited competition, leading to a reduction in quality for passengers. — AFP

## Pakistan seeks to clinch IMF bailout deal, says official

**KARACHI:** Pakistan is looking to clinch a staff level agreement on an International Monetary Fund bailout of more than \$6 billion this month after addressing all of the lender's requirements in its annual budget, its junior finance minister told Reuters. The South Asian country has set challenging revenue targets in its annual budget to help it win approval from the IMF for a loan to stave off another economic meltdown, even as domestic anger rises at new taxation measures.

"We hope to culminate this (IMF) process in the next three to four weeks," Minister of State for Finance, Revenue and Power Ali Pervaiz Malik said on Wednesday, with the aim of thrashing out a staff level agreement before the IMF board recess. "I think it will be north of \$6 billion," he said of the size of the package, though he added at this point the IMF's validation was primary focus.

The IMF did not respond immediately to a request for comment. Pakistan has set a tax revenue target of 13 trillion rupees (\$47 billion) for the fiscal year that began on July 1, a near-40 percent jump from the prior year, and a sharp drop in its fiscal deficit to 5.9 percent of gross domestic product from 7.4 percent the previous year.

Malik said the point of pushing out a tough and unpopular budget was to use it a stepping stone for an IMF program, adding the lender was satisfied with the revenue measures taken, based on their talks. "There are no major issues left to address, now that all major prior actions have been met, the budget being one of them," Malik said. While the budget may win approval from the IMF, it could fuel public anger, according to analysts.

"Obviously they (budget reforms) are burdensome for the local economy but the IMF program is all about stabilization," Malik said. Sakib Sherani, an economist who heads private firm Macro Economic Insights, said a quick deal with the IMF was needed to avoid pressure on Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and the currency given the country's maturing debt repayments and the effects of unwinding of capital and import controls that were applied earlier. "If it takes longer, then the central bank may be forced to temporarily re-instate import and capital controls," he said. "There will be a period of uncertainty, and one casualty is likely to be the rally in equities."

Pakistan's benchmark share index closed up 0.9 percent on Wednesday, reaching a record intraday high of 80,405 points before closing at 80,332 points. The index has rallied roughly 10 percent since the budget was presented on June 12, helped by continued optimism on getting an IMF bailout package to bolster the struggling economy. — Reuters

## Germany halts sale of VW's gas turbine business to China

**BERLIN:** Germany's cabinet blocked the planned sale of the gas turbine business of Volkswagen unit MAN Energy Solutions to a Chinese company on Wednesday, with ministers citing security reasons.

The decision comes amid rising trade tensions between the EU and China. Germany's economy ministry can review and stop transactions deemed to have national security implications, and Berlin and the EU are trying to reduce risks from economic ties with Beijing.

The planned sale of the German business to Chinese state-owned CSIC Longjiang GH Gas Turbine Co (GHGT) was announced in June 2023 at an undisclosed price, but MAN Energy Solutions said in September the government would take a close look.

GHGT belongs to the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC), which dominates the Chinese shipbuilding industry. Some German politicians are concerned that China might use the gas turbines not for civilian purposes but to power warships.

Asked about the decision at a news conference, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser welcomed it "for security reasons". Economy Minister Robert Habeck said Germany generally welcomed investment but that technologies important for "public order" must be protected and that was why the deal was stopped. MAN Energy Solutions said it respected the government's decision and would start a structured process to wind down the new development of gas turbines. — Reuters

## Japan launches banknotes with hologram portraits

**TOKYO:** Japan began circulating its first new banknotes in 20 years on Wednesday, featuring three-dimensional portraits of the founders of financial and female education institutions in an attempt to frustrate counterfeiters. The notes use printed patterns to generate holograms of the portraits facing different directions, depending on the angle of view, employing a technology that Japan's National Printing Bureau says is the world's first for paper money.

"Faces of those representing Japan's capitalism, women's empowerment and technology innovation are on the new bills," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said at a function. The step comes just as the economy moves into a growth-driven phase for the first time in three decades, he added.

Key companies are raising workers' wages at the fastest rate in 33 years, but lingering inflation, fed by the rapid weakening of the yen currency, keeps consumption and the mood of business sluggish, recent economic data show. Existing bills will stay in use, but train stations, parking lots and ramen shops are scrambling to upgrade payment machines as the government pushes consumers and businesses to use less cash in its bid to digitize the economy. The new 10,000-yen (\$62) note depicts Eiichi Shibusawa (1840-1931), the founder of the first bank and stock exchange, who is often called "the father of Japanese capitalism".

The new 5,000-yen bill portrays educator Umeo Tsuda (1864-1929), who founded one of the first women's universities in Japan, while the 1,000-yen



TOKYO: Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda delivers a speech at the start of issuance of new yen banknotes at the Bank of Japan headquarters in Tokyo on July 3, 2024. — AFP

bill features a pioneering medical scientist, Shibasaburo Kitasato (1853-1931). While Kishida talked up the latest technology to fight counterfeiting, it is not a major problem in Japan. The 681 fake banknotes police detected in 2023 represented a sharp drop from a record high of 25,858 in 2004. Authorities plan to print about 7.5 billion newly-designed bills by the end of the current fiscal year, swelling the 18.5

billion banknotes, worth 125 trillion yen, in circulation by December 2023. "Cash is a secure means of payment that can be used by anyone, anywhere, and at any time, and it will continue to play a significant role" despite alternatives, said central bank governor Kazuo Ueda. The Bank of Japan has experimented with digital currencies, but the government has made no decision whether to issue a digital yen. — Reuters

## Dhaka launches climate action plan to future-proof city

**DHAKA:** Lashed by torrential rains and scorched by brutal heatwaves, Dhaka's workers - from rickshaw drivers to those working in clothes factories - are exposed more than most to the reality of the climate emergency. Bangladesh's capital, one of the world's most congested and polluted mega-cities, is home to around 10 million people, including thousands who have fled floods and droughts in other parts of a country that is on the front-line of climate change.

Managing these huge numbers while also climate-proofing the riverside city is a huge challenge but it is an urgent one that city authorities are hoping to address with their first climate action plan, which was launched in May. "Transforming Dhaka was critical towards making Bangladesh green and climate-resilient," said Environment Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury at the launch.

The plan will serve as a roadmap to enable the city to become carbon-neutral by 2050 and includes strategies to help it cope with ever more frequent floods and heatwaves. It includes proposals to switch to renewable energy sources, introduce electric vehicles, increase green spaces, restore natural drainage systems, establish early flood warning systems and ensure a secure water supply by 2030.

Dhaka is just the latest city in the region to seek to face the climate challenge head-on.

Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate hazards in 2023, including floods, storms and heatwaves, and the region is also warming faster than other areas, according to the World Meteorological Organization. With around 704 million people living in urban areas in South Asia, the race is on to equip cities for a hotter, more dangerous future.

First of all, cities must set baselines for greenhouse gas emissions and risks so that they can measure prog-

ress over time, said Shruti Narayan, managing director at the C40 Cities network, a global network of cities working on climate action. "Data-driven targets and monitoring is critical to turning the plans into reality," Narayan told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The C40 platform helps cities align their climate plans with the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit global warming to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

More than 60 cities have announced such plans under the platform so far, including some of Asia's biggest urban areas. The Indian cities of Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru have already adopted climate plans and Karachi in Pakistan is drawing up its own blueprint.

The stakes are high: the Asian Development Bank says that unless planet-heating emissions are cut, the collective economy of six countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka - could shrink by up to 1.8 percent every year by 2050 and 8.8 percent by 2100, on average. Already, the livelihoods of more than 200 million people in these countries are threatened by the rapid loss of snow cover in the Himalayas and rising sea levels, according to the ADB.

Cities consume two-thirds of the world's energy and house 50 percent of the global population. More than 10,000 cities have committed to cutting emissions and adapting to climate hazards. As part of its climate plan, Dhaka's twin municipalities - north and south - established emissions inventories for 2021-22 by identifying most polluting sectors and then set a target of cutting 70 percent of emissions by 2050. One challenge is financing the required changes: cities in the Global South have long complained about richer countries not paying their fair share to cover the costs of climate change.

This year's COP29 climate summit in Azerbaijan is expected to focus on setting a goal for the levels of climate



A file photo of Dhaka city. Dhaka is just the latest city in the region to seek to face the climate challenge head-on.

finance that will be needed from 2025 onwards to help poorer nations curb emissions, adapt to worsening extreme weather and higher seas, and respond to unavoidable climate "loss and damage".

In the meantime, some cities in the Global South have invested in innovative digital tools, like digital twins, to build climate resilience, while others scramble for resources. Mumbai - the richest municipality in India with an annual budget of nearly 600 billion Indian rupees (\$7.2 billion) in 2024-25 - was able to allocate around 100 billion Indian rupees (\$1.2 billion) for various climate actions like expanding tree cover, reviving urban parks, and managing floods. Mumbai's climate allocation dwarfs the entire budget of northern Dhaka - 53 billion taka (\$450.3 million) in 2023-24 - which means the resource-strapped city must prioritize cheaper actions, said Md Sirajul Islam, chief town planner of Dhaka South City Corporation. Jaya Dhindaw, head of the South Asian chapter of the World Resources Institute (WRI) that developed the climate plans for several Indian cities, said realistic, achievable actions help set the pace for progress. For example, in early June, Bengaluru's deputy chief minister announced extended opening hours for urban parks to provide shade for the city's people.

"With low-hanging actions like these, you can drive cities' confidence that climate actions are doable proj-

ects," Dhindaw said. However, Dhaka will need funding to raise the share of renewable power to 85 percent, treat a massive amount of organic waste to stem methane emissions, and ensure that 95 percent of vehicles are electric. The city might need to call on global donors, said Jubaer Rashid, the Bangladesh country representative of ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, a global network of local and national governments. "We will work closely with city officials to help them develop proposals for fundraising," said Rashid, who worked with Dhaka's municipalities on their climate plans.

Urban planners and environmental activists said that another priority must be pushing back against the poor planning that has exacerbated problems caused by the changing climate. For example, in the northern part of Dhaka, green cover has shrunk by 66 percent in last three decades alone with canals and fields destroyed to make space for densely populated residential zones.

The city's rapid, unplanned growth has choked rivers like the Buriganga and blocked drains causing worse flooding, said urban planner Mehedi Ahsan, who represents the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Bangladesh. The climate action plan aims to restore the canals and expand green spaces to cover 25 percent of the city by 2050. — Reuters



# Burgan Bank launches WAMD instant payment service

Under the umbrella of bank's dedicated technology and digital transformation strategy

**KUWAIT:** In continued efforts to add convenience to its banking experience, Burgan Bank announced that all customers can now benefit from the newly-launched instant payment service WAMD using the Burgan Mobile application. The instant payment service, developed by KNET under the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), allows customers to send, receive and request money transfers easily, safely, and securely. The bank's launch of the WAMD service comes as part of its dedicated digital transformation strategy and its commitment to the CBK strategy for reducing cash transactions and encouraging reliance on digital services.

Unlike traditional domestic account-to-account transactions, which require a long list of information – including an account number, IBAN and more – domestic instant payments and transfers with WAMD require only utilizing a registered phone number. To start using the instant payment service, which is available around the clock, customers are required to register to the WAMD service and link it to one active bank account to be able to send, receive and request money. The daily and monthly available limits for

WAMD are KD 3,000 and KD 20,000, respectively, while the limit per transaction is KD 1,000.

Commenting on the launch of WAMD, Barrak Al-Mattar, General Manager – Information Technology at Burgan Bank, said: "Sending and receiving money is a daily need that is equally vital regardless of the size of transactions. To ensure that a need as recurring and essential as making payments and transfers domestically is fulfilled with convenience, speed, and ease, Burgan Bank was among the adopters of KNET's innovative solution, WAMD, which makes sending money digitally as easy as sending a text message. This instant payment service marks a milestone in popularizing digital financial services across Kuwait and the overall success of CBK's national digital transformation strategy – which Burgan Bank proudly continues to contribute to actively."

In line with the introduction of WAMD on the Burgan Mobile application, the Bank is set to release a series of educational and awareness posts that walk customers through the safest and best use of the new payment technology. This comes as part of Burgan's

committed support of the banking awareness and financial literacy campaign "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) – launched by the CBK and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), with the support of Kuwaiti banks.

As a pioneer in digital transformation, Burgan Bank continues to adopt the latest banking and financial digital solutions that serve to meet customers' evolving needs and growing aspirations. The innovative products and services that the Bank recently launched include the option to open several Burgan accounts like Kanz account in less than a minute. Other digital innovations include the introduction of digital banking cards and digital payment solutions, such as Apple Pay, Google Pay and Tajarati Pay for Tajarati platform users.



Barrak Al-Mattar



## Indian officials visit Foxconn iPhone plant

**NEW DELHI:** Indian labor officials visited a Foxconn factory in the country's south this week and questioned executives about the company's hiring practices, an official said, after Reuters reported that the major Apple supplier has been rejecting married women from iPhone assembly jobs.

A five-member team of the federal government's regional labor department visited the Foxconn factory near Chennai, in Tamil Nadu state, on July 1 and spoke to company directors and human resources officials. A Narasaiah, the regional labor commissioner, told Reuters by telephone on Wednesday.

Foxconn did not immediately respond to a request for comment, while Apple did not address questions from Reuters about the visit. The inquiries come after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government asked state officials and the office of the federal government's Regional Chief Labour Commissioner last week to provide detailed reports on the matter, following Reuters' investigation into hiring practices at the manufacturing facility. "We are collecting information, and have asked the company to submit documents like company policies, recruitment policies" as well as evidence of compliance with labor laws and information on maternity and retirement benefits, Narasaiah said. "They told us they are not discriminating."

Narasaiah said Foxconn told the labor officials the factory employs 41,281 people, including 33,360 women. Of these women, some 2,750, or about 8 percent, were married, he said, citing Foxconn's submission. Foxconn did not break down the staffing figures into specific areas such as iPhone assembly, where Reuters reported the discrimination was taking place, Narasaiah said. He added that the labor inspectors interviewed 40 married women inside the plant, who raised no concerns about discrimination.

Narasaiah said he currently has no plan to question Foxconn's third-party hiring agents, who scout for candidates and bring them to the plant for interviews. A Reuters investigation published last week found Foxconn systematically excluded married women from assembly jobs at its main Indian iPhone plant on the grounds they have more family responsibilities than their unmarried counterparts. Foxconn HR sources and third-party hiring agents cited family duties, pregnancy and higher absenteeism as reasons for not hiring married women.

The reporting also found that Taiwan-based Foxconn relaxes the practice of not hiring married women during high-production periods. The story has sparked debates on TV channels, newspaper editorials, and calls from opposition figures and women's groups, including within Modi's party, to investigate the matter. Responding to the Reuters investigation, Apple and Foxconn acknowledged lapses in hiring practices in 2022 and said they had worked to address the issues. All the discriminatory practices documented by Reuters at the Tamil Nadu plant, however, took place in 2023 and 2024. The companies did not address those instances. Foxconn, also known as Hon Hai Precision Industry, has previously said it "vigorously refutes allegations of employment discrimination based on marital status, gender, religion or any other form." Apple has said all its suppliers, including Foxconn, hire married women and "when concerns about hiring practices were first raised in 2022, we immediately took action and worked with our supplier to conduct monthly audits to identify issues and ensure that our high standards are upheld".

Indian law does not bar companies from discriminating in hiring based on marital status, though Apple's and Foxconn's policies prohibit such practices in their supply chains. — Reuters

## India plans to hike rural housing subsidies to over \$6.5bn

**NEW DELHI:** India plans to increase state subsidies on rural housing in the upcoming federal budget by as much as 50 percent from the previous year to more than \$6.5 billion, after setbacks for the prime minister's party in elections, two government sources said.

The planned hike in housing subsidies is part of a broader government initiative to boost spending on rural infrastructure including village roads and a jobs program to help millions of young people stuck in the agriculture sector amid limited manufacturing jobs. If approved, it would mark the largest annual increase in federal spending on the rural housing program since its inception in 2016.

"The government is worried over widespread rural economic distress, driven by higher food inflation and sluggish growth in farmers' incomes," said one of the government sources with knowledge of budget discussions. Shares of Housing and Urban Development Corp HUDCO rose as much as 9 percent after the Reuters report, while Aadhar Housing Finance AADA.NS and GIC Housing Finance GICH.NS rose around 4.5 percent.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is having to rely on allies to run the government for the first time in a decade, after the opposition did much better than expected in a bitterly fought national election that ended last month. Under the PM Awas Yojna (Rural) housing scheme, the government aims to facilitate construction of an additional 20 million houses over the next few years, after providing aid for more than 26 million homes for poor households over the past eight years.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is expected to announce details of plan during the budget presentation later this month. "We expect a substantial increase in allocations for several rural schemes this year, including housing, roads and jobs program," said the second government source, noting federal subsidies for rural housing

## Sri Lanka to save \$5bn from debt deal

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka will save \$5 billion following the restructure of its bilateral debt, much of which is owed to China, through slashed interest rates and longer repayment schedules, the president said Tuesday.

The island nation defaulted on its foreign borrowings in 2022 during an unprecedented economic crisis that precipitated months of food, fuel and medicine shortages. President Ranil Wickremesinghe said a deal struck last week had secured a moratorium on debt payments until 2028, extending the tenure of loans by eight years and cutting interest rates to an average of 2.1 percent.

Wickremesinghe said bilateral lenders led by China, the government's largest single creditor, did not agree to take a haircut on their loans, but the terms agreed would nonetheless help Sri Lanka. "With the restructure measures we have agreed, we will make a saving of \$5.0 billion," Wickremesinghe told parliament in his first address to the legislature since the debt deal. Some of Sri Lanka's loans from China are at high interest rates, going up to nearly 8.0 percent compared to borrowings from Japan, the second largest lender, at less than 1.0 percent.

Sri Lanka struck separate deals with China and the rest of the bilateral creditors, including Japan, France and India. Bilateral creditors account for 28.5 percent of Sri Lanka's outstanding foreign debt of \$37 billion, according to treasury data

## Pakistan to tackle bidders' concern over airline safety ban

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's privatization commission is addressing concerns voiced by those qualified to bid for the country's national airline about a European Union Aviation Safety



MUMBAI: Residents stand amid the debris of their allegedly illegal houses demolished by civic authorities in Mumbai. — AFP

could exceed 550 billion rupees (\$6.58 billion), up from 320 billion rupees last fiscal year. He said state spending on the rural jobs program was expected to increase substantially from an earlier estimate of 860 billion rupees, but the government may seek parliament approval for this additional spending later, not as part of the budget.

He said a separate proposal for increasing spending on village roads was also under consideration, from earlier estimates of 120 billion rupees in the current fiscal year. Both sources spoke on the condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss budget proposals with the media.

During pre-budget consultations, economists and industry leaders urged the government to ramp up rural spending to stimulate consumer demand, noting that private consumption was growing at half the

pace of nearly 8 percent annual economic growth. The sources said to build 20 million houses for the poor in the rural areas, the federal and state governments are expected to allocate up to 4 trillion (\$47.89 billion) over the next few years, with the federal government contributing around 2.63 trillion rupees. A finance ministry spokeswoman didn't comment when asked about spending plans.

Last month, shortly after assuming office, Modi's cabinet announced plans to assist in the construction of 30 million houses in rural and urban areas, without disclosing financial details.

The Ministry of Rural Development has proposed increasing state subsidies to about 200,000 rupees (\$2,395) per housing unit, up from 120,000 rupees previously, citing rising costs of raw materials, the second official said. — Reuters



COLOMBO: Supporters of Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe burst firecrackers to celebrate after he addressed the nation during a live telecast in Colombo. — AFP

from March. This excludes government-guaranteed external loans. China accounts for \$4.66 billion of the \$10.58 billion that Sri Lanka has borrowed from other countries.

Wickremesinghe said he expected to complete shortly the restructure of a further \$14.7 billion in external commercial loans, including \$2.18 billion from the China Development Bank. Sri Lanka's 2022 crisis sparked months of public protests that eventually

Agency (EASA) ban on the carrier, an official said on Wednesday.

The privatization of the loss-making state-owned enterprises has long been on the International Monetary Fund's list of recommendations for Pakistan, which is seeking to strike a deal with the fund for a longer term bailout this month. The privatization commission pre-qualified six consortiums for bidding in June and expects to conclude the privatization process of Pakistan International Airlines PIA.HK.PSX by next month.

Usman Bajwa, secretary of the commission,

forced the resignation of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa after an angry mob stormed his compound. Wickremesinghe said the nation was bankrupt when he took over and he hoped the \$2.9 billion International Monetary Fund bailout he secured last year would be the island's last. Colombo had gone to the IMF, the international lender of last resort, on 16 previous occasions and the debt restructuring is a condition of the IMF bailout. — AFP

told a briefing the body was addressing concerns voiced by those pre-qualified by the government to bid for a stake ranging from 51 percent to 100 percent.

Previous governments avoided disposing of the flag carrier as a potentially highly unpopular move, but the country needs to unlock further funding from the IMF. EASA banned the PIA from its most lucrative routes in Europe and Britain after a PIA plane crash in Karachi in 2020 killed nearly 100, followed by a scandal over pilot licenses. The ban continues, costing the airline annual revenue of nearly 40 billion



THURSDAY, JULY 4, 2024

An SAS airplane prepares to land at Longyearbyen airport, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway. — AFP photos



## TOURISTS SEEK OUT NORDIC HOLIDAYS TO KEEP COOL

**F**ar from her home in the tourist mecca of Tenerife, Cati Padilla is one of the growing number of travelers escaping heatwaves for cooler holidays in Nordic countries. Countries like Norway and Sweden in northern Europe are now promoting "coolcations" to attract visitors to their temperate climates. Why leave the Canaries in summer? "To escape the heat,"

slump in Scandinavian currencies. But a survey in Germany for tourist organization Visit Sweden also found that two out of five people plan to change their travel habits due to the southern European heat, opting for different seasons or cooler destinations.

"Coolcation is not just about the weather," said Susanne Andersson, head of Visit Sweden. "It's about travelling to places where it's a little bit cooler both in the weather but also cooler in the sense of not that many people." For some people, gone are the overcrowded Mediterranean beaches and heatwaves causing forest fires and the partial closure of the Acropolis in the Greek capital in June. Nowadays, many prefer to take a dip in a lake or a fjord, or fill their lungs with fresh air on a mountain hike in relative isolation.

### Killer summer

When British tourist Pam disembarked from a cruise ship on the majestic Geiranger Fjord, a UNESCO World Heritage site, she expected to find cool weather. But she found herself in sandals and a t-shirt, rather than the raincoat and woolen clothes she packed. "It's been wonderful," said the resident of Lichfield city in west-central England. "It's still not that hot that you can't walk." "It just does not interest me now to sit on a sunbed, read a book, get up, go and have something to eat and come back to the sunbed. I'd rather visit places, find the history and just look at beautiful places."

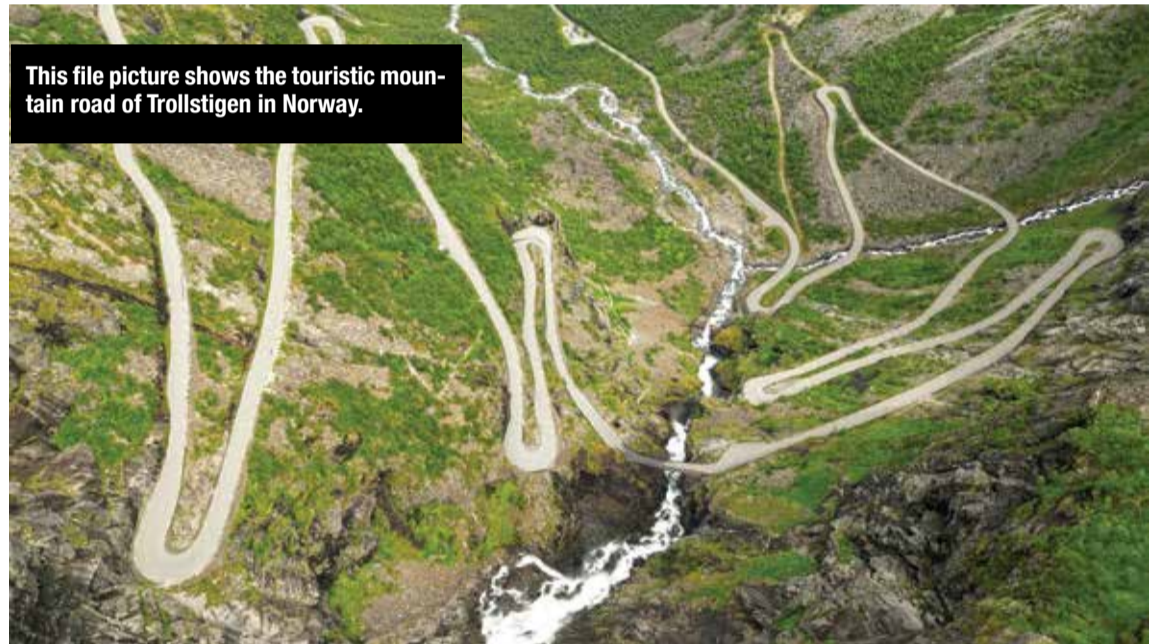
The frequency and intensity of extreme heat events and the duration of heatwaves have "almost certainly" increased since 1950 and will continue to do so with global warming, according to UN climate experts. By 2050, half of Europe's population could face high or very high-risk heat stress in summer, with heat-related deaths potentially doubling or tripling with temperature rises of between 1.5 degrees Celsius (34.7 degrees Fahrenheit) to 3C. "Spain is a no. Greece is a no," said 74-year-old French pensioner Gerard Grollier, as he disembarked from a coach in Geiranger village in western Norway. Why Norway? "The climate is much more pleasant," explained his daughter, Virginie, a financial adviser. "We have not protected our planet, and now that is impacting tourism."

### Submerged villages

The capital of Lapland in northern Finland, Rovaniemi, recorded a 29 percent jump in overnight stays last year. "You can feel the 'coolcation' here, the trend started

at the same time," emphasized Jan Ove Tryggestad, former mayor of a Norwegian village where a cruise ship carrying 6,000 passengers and 2,000 crew members had just docked. "It's a small village here.

This file picture shows the touristic mountain road of Trollstigen in Norway.



File picture shows tourists from China photograph a fjord in Unstad on Lofoten Islands.

said Padilla while on holiday with her friends. "Norway attracted our attention a long time ago because of the green landscape, the mountains and the ice," added the civil servant in her fifties on the so-called "troll path", a serpentine mountain route towards the fjords.

In 2023, foreign overnight stays rose by 22 percent in Norway and 11 percent in Sweden according to official statistics, mainly driven by the end of Covid-related restrictions in 2022 and a



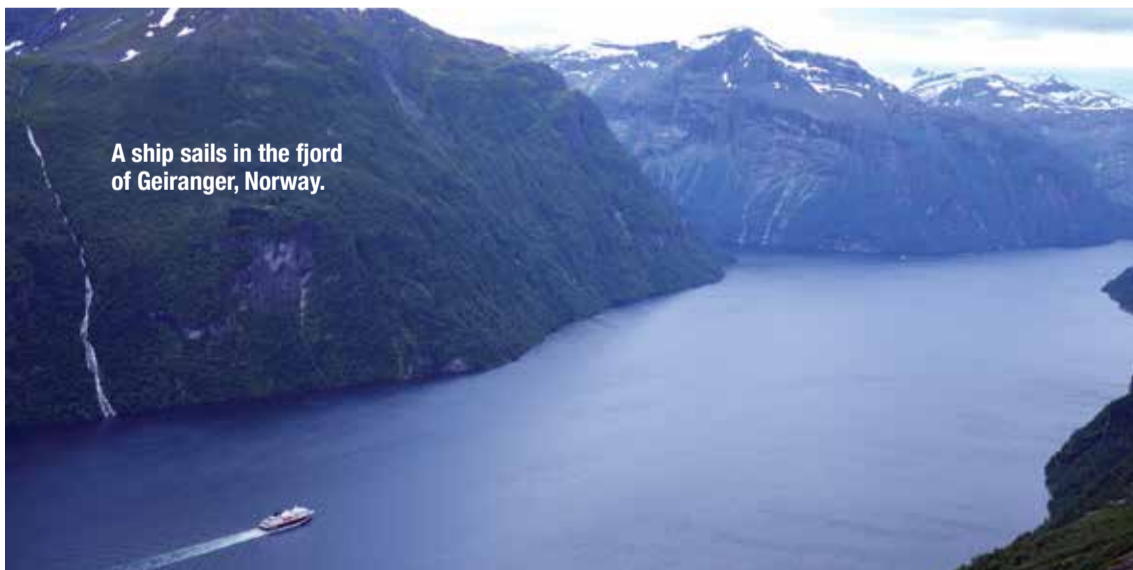
Snow mobiles are parked next to wooden buildings in Longyearbyen, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.



Tourists come back to Longyearbyen after a tour on snow mobiles, on May 8, 2022, on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.

years ago but it has increased with the hot summers in southern and central Europe," said Sanna Karkkainen, who promotes tourism in Rovaniemi. The coolcation influx has its issues, including a surge in Airbnb properties and unruly tourists. "Our main concern is to have too many people

In Hellesylt, there are between 280 to 300 winter inhabitants. Obviously it's a bit of a culture shock when suddenly a small town, by European standards, turns up," he added. "But we adapt." — AFP



A ship sails in the fjord of Geiranger, Norway.



This file picture shows a small boat anchored in the fjord in Valdalen, Norway.



The cruise ship MSC Euribia moors in the harbour in Hellesylt, in the Geiranger fjord, Norway.



A boat with tourists onboard leaves Longyearbyen, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.



A small iceberg is pictured on the lake of Djupvatnet, Norway.



Picture shows a view of Longyearbyen airport, located on Spitsbergen island, in Svalbard Archipelago, northern Norway.



## Lifestyle



Members of the The Arctic Challenge Expedition Team rowers based in the UAE practice in simulated circumstances at an aviation training center in Dubai.

## Dubai rowers to brave Arctic to highlight plastics pollution

At an indoor pool in Dubai, three rowers battle artificial rain and simulated waves as they train for an Arctic voyage intended to highlight the perils of marine pollution. Their quest will take the team from one extreme to the next. Home base is the United Arab Emirates, notorious for its sweltering heat, especially in summer. Their destination is one of the world's coldest regions - although because of climate change it is warming three times faster than the global average.

For leader Toby Gregory, it is a chance to sound the alarm about the scourge of plastic waste in the world's oceans, a mission he took on after a 2023 Atlantic Ocean rowing trip during which he saw "a lot more plastic than I ever imagined". The United Nations says plastics account for 85 percent of all marine trash. Last year Gregory founded The Plastic Pledge, which tries to educate students about plastic disposal. "We want to inspire one million students, not just in the UAE but around the world, to do things differently," Gregory, a media adviser for UAE royal families, told AFP. "Do you just put your trash outside and hope it goes



to recycling? Well, can you do something and be more proactive?" He added: "The greatest threat to our planet is that everyone believes that somebody else will save it."

### 'Arctic Challenge'

The "Arctic Challenge" will see 46-year-old Gregory, his fellow Briton Andrew Savill, 39, and 30-year-old Irishwoman Orlagh Dempsey embark late this month on a 1,500-kilometre voyage. They will set off from the city Tromso in northern Norway and

head for Longyearbyen, capital of the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. They plan to row for roughly three weeks aboard an eight-meter (26-foot) boat flying the UAE flag, and with no sail or engine.

By leaving in summer, a time of non-stop sunshine in the polar region, they can use solar panels to maximum effect to power navigation and communications equipment. Undertaken in partnership with the UN Environment Program Clean Seas initiative, theirs is set to be a milestone mission, with the group becoming the first three-person team to row the Arctic Ocean and Dempsey the first woman to do so. Training in Dubai, where the summer heat has driven them indoors, forced them to get creative.

During a recent session at Dynamic Advanced Training, a center that focuses on aviation, they tried to board a vessel in choppy waves as artificial rain, thunder and lightning produced storm-like conditions. But with temperatures in Dubai these days topping 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), Arctic weather has become "very hard to replicate", Savill said.

Once at sea in the Arctic, the mer-



Members of the The Arctic Challenge Expedition Team rowers (left to right) Briton Andrew Savill, Irishwoman Orlagh Dempsey and Briton Toby Gregory based in the UAE, pose for a picture during simulations at an aviation training center in Dubai. — AFP photos

cury is expected to hover between zero and 10 degrees Celsius, Savill said, so to prepare they hope to take advantage of whatever climate-controlled spaces they can find. One option is Ski Dubai, an indoor resort where temperatures drop to minus 2 degrees Celsius (28.4 degrees Fahrenheit). "Hopefully we can get in there and do a little bit of training for a few hours. Just to give us the real

kind of cold temperature," Savill said. Dempsey is counting on her chilly Irish upbringing to see her through. "I had the first 20 years of my life in cold conditions," she said with a laugh. "I think it's just something that mentally and physically we'll adapt to when we get there, and I don't think it's going to be a problem for any of us." — AFP



A deer is seen after Cedric Petit rescued it with his drone in the tall grass of the Mehaigne meadows.

## In Belgian farmland, 'Saving Bambi' one dawn mission at a time

Cedric Petit's drone hummed above a Belgian field. He spotted a white dot on the control screen: a tiny fawn nestled in the tall grasses - soon to be rescued from a grisly end. Four years ago, the 40-year-old wildlife lover founded a group with a simple mission: "Saving Bambi" helps farmers avoid the nasty surprise of finding a tiny mammal or nesting bird ground up by their machin-

ery. Called in before the harvest, usually last-minute and working for free, Petit and his fellow volunteers use drones equipped with heat-sensitive cameras to locate at-risk animals and move them to the safety of woods nearby.

Its work is modelled on the example of Germany and Switzerland, where larger networks of volunteers carry out

animals' spindly legs are still too frail to carry their own weight, making them entirely vulnerable to the blades of a giant mower. On that morning in Eghezee, the drone sensor first spotted a hare enjoying a morning feast of alfalfa, then a young male roe deer taking a dawn stroll through the cool grasses. At last Petit spotted a sleeping fawn, curled in a little ball.

He drew near, with gloves and a small crate covered in hay, to relocate the animal as gently as he can. "This little guy is one-and-a-half, maybe two weeks old," said Petit. "Now we need to move him to safety at the edge of the woods, where his mother can find him." Most rescues involve roe deer fawns, whose mothers move them from the woods into the fields after birth so they can bathe in sunlight in their crucial first days of life.

"Deer fawns are rarer - they're tougher, like foals, and can keep up with their mothers pretty soon after birth," Petit explained. Beyond the animal welfare argument, "Saving Bambi" also helps ward off botulism poisoning for livestock - a risk were they to feed from bales of hay contaminated by animal carcasses. "That's a big problem that is best avoided," summed up Bernard Debouche, the farmer who called Petit out on his latest early-morning mission.

Before knowing about the tracking system, Debouche would find the remains of a baby animal caught in the blades after mowing his fields - a "very unpleasant experience," he recalled. "We used to go blindly ahead, and sometimes we just couldn't see them - they are so tiny we would just roll over them," he said. "And no one wants to see a young fawn crushed by a mower." — AFP

### 'Go blindly'

To get a good wide view of a field, pilots fly their drones at a height of around 70 meters (230 feet) - taking the time needed to spot a fawn curled at ground level. Barely weeks old, the

## Ants perform limb amputations on injured comrades to save their lives, research finds

Limb amputations are performed by surgeons when a traumatic injury such as a wound from war or a vehicle accident causes major tissue destruction or in instances of serious infection or disease. But humans are not alone in doing such procedures. New research shows that some ants perform limb amputations on injured comrades to improve their survival chances. The behavior was documented in Florida carpenter ants - scientific name *Camponotus floridanus* - a reddish-brown species more than half an inch (1.5 cm) long inhabiting parts of the southeastern United States.

These ants were observed treating injured limbs of nestmates either by cleaning the wound using their mouthparts or by amputation through biting off the damaged limb. The choice of care depended on the injury's location. When it was further up the leg, they always amputated. When it was further down, they never amputated. "In this study, we describe for the first time how a non-human animal uses amputations on another individual to save their life," said entomologist Erik Frank of the University of Würzburg in Germany, lead author of the research published on Tuesday in the journal *Current Biology*.

"I am convinced that we can safely say that the ants' 'medical system' to care for the injured is the most sophisticated in the animal kingdom, rivaled only by our own," Frank added. This species nests in rotting wood and defends their home vigorously against rival ant colonies. "If fights break out, there is a risk of injury," Frank said. The researchers studied injuries to the upper part of the leg, the femur, and the lower part, the tibia. Such injuries are commonly found in wild ants of various species, sustained in fights, while hunting or through predation by other animals. The ants were observed in laboratory conditions.

"They decide between amputating the leg or spending more time caring for the wound. How they decide this, we do not know. But we do know why the treatment differs," Frank said. It has to do with the flow of hemolymph, the bluish-greenish fluid equivalent to blood in most invertebrates.

"Injuries further down the leg have an increased hemolymph flow, meaning that pathogens already enter the body after only five minutes, rendering amputations useless by the time they could be performed. Injuries further up the leg have a much slower hemolymph flow, giving enough time for timely and effective amputations,"

Frank said. In either case, the ants first cleaned the wound, likely applying secretions from glands in the mouth while also probably sucking out infected and dirty hemolymph. The amputation process itself takes at least 40 minutes and sometimes more than three hours, with constant biting at the shoulder.

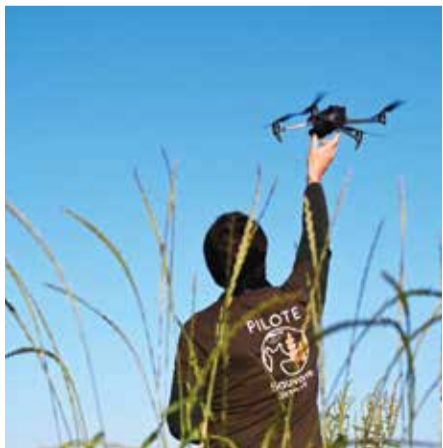
With amputations after an upper leg injury, the survival rate documented was around 90-95%, compared to about 40% for unattended injuries. For lower leg injuries in which just cleaning was performed, the survival rate was about 75%, compared to around 15% for unattended injuries. Wound care has been documented in other



Weaver ant or green ant carry their injured companion.

ant species that apply an antibiologically effective glandular secretion to injured nestmates. This species lacks that gland. Ants, which have six legs, are fully functional after losing one. It was female ants observed doing this behavior. "All worker ants are female. Males play only a minor role in ant colonies - mate once with the queen and then die," Frank said. So why do the ants do these amputations?

"This is an interesting question and it does put into question our current definitions of empathy, at least to some extent. I do not think that the ants are what we would call 'compassionate,'" Frank said. "There is a very simple evolutionary reason for caring for the injured. It saves resources. If I can rehabilitate a worker with relatively little effort who will then again become an active productive member of the colony, there is a very high value of doing so. At the same time, if an individual is too heavily injured, the ants will not care for her, but rather leave her behind to die," Frank added. — AFP



Cedric Petit uses a drone to detect deer hiding in the tall grass of the Mehaigne meadows.



Cedric Petit, founder of the "Asbl Sauvons Bambi" association, rescues a deer detected with his drone in the tall grass of the Mehaigne meadows. — AFP photos

thousands of rescues every year across huge areas of farmland. Petit's growing Belgian operation has around 80 drone pilots who freely devote their time during the most critical six weeks of the year - like him, they work around their day jobs.



# Single and proud: South Korean YouTuber's viral embrace of solo life



This picture shows Seen Aromi, a South Korean YouTuber, practicing yoga at a studio in Gyeonggi-do Province. — AFP photos



This picture shows Seen Aromi working out with her personal trainer at a gymnasium.



This picture shows Seen Aromi holding two silver YouTube Creator Awards, each one for passing 100,000 followers, in her home in Gyeonggi-do Province.



This picture shows Seen Aromi walking in her garden where she grows vegetables and fruits, outside her home in Gyeonggi-do Province.

South Korea has declared its super-low birthrate a "national emergency" and poured billions into encouraging citizens to marry and reproduce, but one YouTuber has found happiness and success promoting the opposite ideal. At her home in rural South Korea, Seen Aromi practices yoga, sleeps in as long as she wants and encourages her more than 200,000 YouTube followers to not feel afraid, ashamed or guilty about being single. "Not getting married is my greatest achievement," 37-year-old Seen told AFP, saying that she had never seen becoming a "good" wife or mother as the ultimate purpose of her life.

"They say it's a 'disaster'" that women are not having children in South Korea, she said, referring to official concern over the looming demographic crisis in the country, which has the world's lowest birth rate and a rapidly ageing population. "But when I think about the potential downsides of not having children, (for me) there is nothing," she added. Seen wrote about the joy she found in opting out of society's expectations and embracing solo living, and her book -- "I Can't Help but Live Well On My Own" -- has become a surprise hit.

It briefly topped a major bestseller chart in South Korea, with an enthusiastic response not only from other single women in their 30s, but also from an older generation, including people who had been widowed or divorced. She enthused in the book about having "the freedom to be as lazy as I want" and not being criticized for it. "While some people might marry because they dislike being alone, others choose not to meet anyone simply because they enjoy lying around," she wrote.

### Traditional trappings

Experts have suggested that many young Koreans opt out of marriage and child-rearing at least in part for economic reasons, pointing to stagnant growth, sky-high home prices in the capital Seoul, and intense competition for well-paying jobs. Others say broader cultural issues are at play. The

country remains socially conservative, single parenthood is frowned upon, same-sex marriage is not recognized, and married women often end up leaving the workforce -- data shows they spend 3.5 times more hours a day on household chores and childcare than male spouses.

her to find genuine happiness. "I've never worked for a big conglomerate, do not live in the city, and never been married," she told AFP.

Her life in Seoul was miserable, Seen told AFP, as she had to suffer through an exhausting commute and a stressful, abusive workplace. After

denied it. They seemed to think 'there's no way that could be true'."

Seen said she had been in several fulfilling relationships, but her autonomy and adventurous lifestyle are her top priority, over starting a family. The fact that her book has become a runaway success proves that you "can



This picture shows Seen Aromi practicing yoga at a studio.

"Traditionally defined gender role expectations in the family domain as well as tension between genders are definitely related to the current low birthrate," Hyeyoung Woo, a sociology professor at Portland State University, told AFP. For Seen, letting go of the traditional South Korean trappings of success -- a Seoul apartment, a high-paying job, a loving spouse -- has allowed



This picture shows Seen Aromi touching leaves of a tree in the garden outside her home in Gyeonggi-do Province.

living overseas for years, working random jobs from hotel housekeeper to packing meat in a chicken factory, and posting videos about her life online, she returned to South Korea and settled in a rural town. She renovated an old family house that used to belong to her late grandfather and her YouTube channel grew in popularity, eventually picking up more than 200,000 subscribers for her posts, which deal with everything from living alone to travelling, fitness and yoga. A single YouTube video now earns her five times more than she used to get monthly as a salaried worker in Seoul, and she can "live a much more autonomous life -- which is extremely satisfying," she said.

### Backlash

Her social media posts about her joyful single life have attracted backlash online, with critics claiming that in reality, Seen must be lonely, or calling her "selfish" for not getting married. "Married people often post photos of their children and share happy images of their married life, and no one really criticizes that," Seen said. "But when I said I was happy, (some people) strongly

still be the best at something even though you live a non-mainstream life," she said.

Most couples who have children do it because it will make them happy, not out of concern for humanity's future -- and people who live alone have also made choices aimed at happiness, which should be respected, she said. Seen told AFP that she was proud of her contributions to the world. While others were having children, she said, "I gave birth to two YouTube channels and a book". —AFP



This picture shows Seen Aromi holding a bunch of freshly harvested green onions and lettuce, next to her vegetable patch, outside her home.



This picture shows Seen Aromi using a computer near an oversized model of her bestseller book called "I Can't Help but Live Well On My Own" (yellow object near lamp) in her office at home.



This picture shows Seen Aromi working out with her personal trainer at a gymnasium in Gyeonggi-do Province.

## LVMH unveils new Givenchy CEO

French luxury conglomerate LVMH said Tuesday that it had appointed Alessandro Valentini as the new CEO of its haute couture house Givenchy. "With this appointment, Givenchy, one of the most emblematic French haute couture houses, embarks upon a new chapter in its history," LVMH said in a statement. Valentini, who has been with the LVMH group since 2014, succeeds Renaud de Lesquen, who had been chief executive at Givenchy since 2020.

"His great knowledge of the luxury sector... his recognized expertise in retail and his managerial qualities will be essential assets in taking Givenchy on to new milestones," Givenchy's board chairman Sidney Toledano said in the statement. The appointment comes just months after the departure of Givenchy's artistic director Matthew Williams, an American who left in December 2023 after three years. —AFP

## 'Chinatown' writer Robert Towne dies aged 89

Robert Towne, the Hollywood writer whose "Chinatown" script is often described as the greatest screenplay ever written, has died at 89. The Oscar winner, whose credits also include "The Last Detail" and "Shampoo," and the first two "Mission: Impossible" films, passed away at home in Los Angeles, publicist Carri McClure told AFP. Towne was a leading figure of the 1970s New Hollywood movement. Several classics benefited from Towne's input, despite his name being absent from their writing credits. Most famously these included "Bonnie and Clyde" and "The Godfather."

The former came early in Towne's career, when he was starting out as a journeyman writer for low-budget 1960s Hollywood films. Towne was dubbed a "creative consultant." For "The Godfather," Towne received a shout-out from the Oscars stage as Francis Ford Coppola accepted the best screenplay prize for his gangster classic. Coppola offered "credit where it is due" for "the very beautiful scene between Marlon [Brando] and Al Pacino in the garden --



Writer/director Robert Towne speaks onstage during the 2016 Writers Guild Awards LA Ceremony at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza on Feb 13, 2016 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

that was Bob Towne's scene." That propelled Towne into the New Hollywood firmament, and remarkable success followed.

At his peak, Towne was nominated for screenplay Oscars three years in a row during the mid-1970s, winning for

"Chinatown." The film features Jack Nicholson as a 1930s private detective, whose investigation into a cheating husband uncovers a world of Los Angeles corruption. Its complex plot, wisecracking yet dark dialogue and daring themes mean "Chinatown" is held up as a perfect

screenplay at film schools, even if director Roman Polanski changed the ending into something far more terrifying than Towne had envisioned. Towne's career never quite reached those heights again -- perhaps an impossible task. His sequel "The Two Jakes" -- with Nicholson returning to star and direct -- earned mixed reviews in 1990.

That same year Towne collaborated with Tom Cruise for "Days of Thunder." The pair would combine again for "The Firm," and the first two films of the "Mission: Impossible" action franchise. Later, he was a consulting producer on television's "Mad Men." "Legendary screenwriter and filmmaker Robert Towne passed away peacefully at home surrounded by his loving family on Monday, July 1st 2024," said a statement. "Information regarding a celebration of life ceremony will be announced at a later date. The Towne family would appreciate privacy during this time." —AFP



## Sports

# Anti-doping agency sharpens its tools for Paris Olympics

## Upgraded software, possibly using artificial intelligence, could also help

LAUSANNE: In the battle against drug use at the Paris Olympics, the International Testing Agency (ITA) plans to deploy a more streamlined, high-tech approach to identify and target potential cheats. In an interview with AFP, Benjamin Cohen, Director General of the ITA, said potential tools as its disposal included biological and performance passports as well as a mountain of other data.

Upgraded software, possibly using artificial intelligence, could also help; an investigative unit aided by whistleblowers was making inroads; and increased cooperation with sports bodies and police was bearing fruit.

ITA, which was founded in 2018, runs the anti-doping program for the Olympics, the Tour de France and "more than 65 international organizations", said Cohen. The challenge was to refine the "risk analysis" and identify athletes to monitor using as little time and resources as possible, said Cohen, a Swiss lawyer who has headed the agency since its creation.

The problem is accentuated in the run-up to the Paris Games. "We still have 30,000 potentially qualifying athletes

and we cannot wait to have the final list to focus on the 11,000 participants," Cohen said. "Certain doping practices enable athletes to achieve results very quickly," he said. "Traditionally the pre-Olympic period is high-risk time...the last moment to make a difference. Athletes know that they will be very closely monitored at the Olympics, so I would hope that very few, if any, will be tempted to take drugs in the Olympic Village in Paris."

At the Games, only medalists are automatically tested, but ITA wants to find ways to target potential dopers before the finish. Cohen said ITA tries to identify patterns. They look at the demands of each discipline and the substances it might tempt athletes to use. Then ITA looks at delegations and "the history of doping in that country". Finally, it scrutinizes each individual athlete and "the development of his or her performances, any suspicious biological passport profiles, suspicious anti-doping tests, and so on." "That's hundreds of thousands of pieces of data."

### 'Risk analysis'

"Today we have our own software,

and the next stage" will involve "programming computers to extract this data, because we still do a lot of this work manually." After that, the ITA hopes to "seize all the opportunities offered by artificial intelligence," provided "we use these new tools ethically."

"If it's done properly," he said. "AI will enable us to go much further in risk analysis and prediction." ITA is developing a "performance passport" as a counterpart to the long-established biological passport. The objective is to "predict results on the basis of what an athlete has done over the last four years", said Cohen.

"Artificial intelligence will enable us to say: 'this is really an unusual result, which could suggest doping,'" he said. "It could help us flag them." The performance passport project was initially tested in swimming and weightlifting, two indoor sports where athletes compete in identical environments each time.

Weightlifting also happens to be one of the two sports, along with athletics, that have returned, between them, the vast majority of positive tests at Summer Olympics. In 2021, ITA carried out "a ma-

major investigation into weightlifting" and that enabled them to set up a specialized unit in cooperation with the sport.

### Focus on cycling

It now has more than ten such units. "Cycling is a particular focus" but "other sports are beginning to understand the benefits of gathering intelligence, having anonymous sources and promoting whistleblowers."

"It's a new method that complements traditional testing," Cohen said ITA has been working to build links with law enforcement and exploit 'synergies'. "They are bearing fruit," he said, referring to the case of 23-year-old Italian cyclist Andrea Piccolo, arrested on June 21 by the Italian Carabinieri who caught him returning to the country with growth hormones.

"ITA asked the Italian authorities to open his luggage, which would not have been possible six years ago," Cohen said. "We carry out the controls, we monitor the performances of these athletes, we know the networks, the doctors involved and the drugs they are taking. And they can seize and open suitcases and enter hotel rooms." — AFP



LAUSANNE: (FILES) International Testing Agency (ITA) director general Swiss Benjamin Cohen poses at the organization's headquarters in Lausanne on August 15, 2018. — AFP

## India WCup winners head home after hurricane delay

NEW DELHI: India's T20 Cricket World Cup winners were finally heading home Wednesday, officials said, after a hurricane in the West Indies delayed their departure. Favourites India won the title on Saturday after defeating South Africa in a thrilling final, but their travel plans were disrupted by Hurricane Beryl.

"The team has left from Barbados on a special Air India flight," Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) vice-president Rajeev Shukla told the Press Trust of India. Rohit Sharma's men were scheduled to reach the Indian capital New Delhi on Thursday morning, where they will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The special flight was arranged after the players were stranded in a hotel for three days after the victory. Rohit, who announced his T20 international retirement alongside fellow star Virat Kohli after the final, posted a picture of him holding the T20 trophy with teammate Suryakumar Yadav aboard the flight, with a caption "Coming home".

After their meeting with Modi, the team will fly to Mumbai for a victory parade in the heart of India's financial capital, Shukla said. Last weekend's win ended an 11-year global cricket trophy drought for India following their 2013 Champions Trophy win.

Their last World Cup victory was at home for the 50-over tournament in 2011 under MS Dhoni. The final was the last match in charge for coach Rahul Dravid, 51, who was bounced in the air by the team during the celebrations. — AFP

## Coach Robertson injects new energy to All Blacks

WELLINGTON: Senior All Blacks are enjoying the energy brought by new head honcho Scott Robertson—the surfing, breakdancing, maverick coach who faces his first Test in charge against England on Saturday.

The man nicknamed "Razor" has inherited a New Zealand side criticized for a lack of innovation under maligned predecessor Ian Foster. Lock Patrick Tuipulotu said Robertson had energized the squad since they gathered in Wellington last week.

"First word that comes to mind is probably 'energy'. I think that's good for this team," said Tuipulotu. "He knows what he wants and certainly brings that to the forefront, especially in the meeting room. 'You don't have many guys falling asleep when he's up there presenting to us.'"

New Zealand open their international season with the first of two Tests against England in Dunedin on Saturday, the All Blacks' first outing since narrowly losing the World Cup final to South Africa in October. "It's inevitable when you change personnel, you have different approaches and different ways of thinking," said center Jordie Barrett.

"You're seeing guys having to relearn some terms, but it's exciting, a fresh change and the boys are looking forward to what's ahead." The All Blacks have lost some big names since the Rugby World Cup. Playmaker Richie Mo'unga, one of Robertson's key lieutenants when he coached Canterbury Crusaders, is now playing in Japan.

Veteran forward Sam Whitelock, who also played under Robertson at Canterbury, has retired after 153 Tests. Robertson has named lock Scott Barrett as captain in place of the injured Sam Cane. Loose forward Ardie Savea and Barrett's brother Jordie are the side's vice-captains.

### Razor sharp

With a mop of blond hair, Robertson is a far cry from the taciturn All Blacks coaches of seasons past.

## Girmay gives hope of expansion for road cycling

VALLOIRE: The very same day Biniam Girmay became the first black African to win a Tour de France stage, Olympic champion Richard Carapaz became the first Ecuadorian to pull on the overall leader's yellow jersey.

A neutral observer may have been forgiven for believing those two events showed top-level road cycling knows no borders. Eritrean Girmay was swift to dedicate his triumph to the "whole African continent", a continent barely represented at the Tour de France.

"There's a bit of development in Africa, but it's slow. Since Daniel Teklehaimanot (an Eritrean who rode in the Tour de France in 2015 and 2016), we have had very few Africans," Jean-Jacques Henry, who plays the role of talent spotter for the International Cycling Union, told AFP.

"It's nice to see what Biniam has achieved and I hope it inspires other African youngsters," Ryan Gibbons from South Africa, one of three riders from the continent at the Tour, said. However, he has little faith that there will be an explosion of Africans in the world's greatest bike race any time soon.

"I think there's only seven in the pro peloton (apart from me)," he said. "There's still a great deal of progress to be made." The composition of the Tour de France peloton has changed in recent years, but European riders still make up the bulk of it. Since Greg LeMond and Lance Armstrong there have been more, and more Americans, and Australians, while the creation of the Cafe Colombia team in the 1980s marked the emergence of the Latin Americans.

Nairo Quintana blazed a trail before Egan Bernal won the Tour to become the first Colombian to do so in 2019. But for a sport which is popular across the globe, Asia counts just two cyclists on the World



TURIN: Wanty team's Eritrean rider Biniam Girmay cycles to the finish line ahead of second-placed Movistar Team's Colombian rider Fernando Gaviria (R) and third-placed Lotto Dstny team's Belgian rider Arnaud De Lie (L) to win the 3rd stage of the 11th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 230.5 km between Piacenza and Turin, in Italy. — AFP

Tour. "To develop the sports across the world we need competitions across the world," said Henry, the man who brought Girmay to the UCI development center at Aigle in Switzerland.

Henry and others try to uncover raw talent like Girmay at the continental championships. "It always takes people time to adapt when they are a long way from home," said Henry. But these riders have a maximum of six months to find a team, while Europeans have a window of around five years.

"We have had riders come to Aigle as national champions, but they had only taken part in four races in their entire life," he said. "We had one from Brazil who'd been in just three." Girmay said it best.

"It's not just that I had to learn English, I had to learn all the language of cycling too," he said after his historic stage win on Monday.

"I have to thank my team, I have grown each year with them and they gave me time." "When we were looking for a team for Biniam and people said it was complicated with visas for African riders," Henry said.

On top of all those barriers, the technological factors also have a considerable role to play. To practice road cycling, above all time-trialling, you need very good roads, not to mention good bikes, with the average cost of a bike on the Tour de France hitting around 15,000 euros (\$16,150). — AFP



UPPER HUTT: New Zealand rugby head coach Scott Robertson speaks during the All Blacks Season Launch at NZCIS in Upper Hutt, near Wellington. — AFP

It is not unusual to see him skateboarding to the beach with a surfboard tucked under his arm near his South Island home.

He famously celebrated the Crusaders' run of Super Rugby titles by breakdancing on the pitch. "We're going to have some fun, still be professional and set a really high expectation of ourselves, but do it with a smile on our faces," Robertson said.

As a player Robertson was a loose forward. He won 23 caps for New Zealand between 1998 and 2002 and was dubbed Razor for the way he scythed down opponents in the tackle. His record as a coach is also sharp—he led Canterbury Crusaders to seven straight Super Rugby titles.

Robertson's critics point to his lack of experience at international level. He coached the Barbarians to victory against a shadow All Blacks XV in late 2022 and helped New Zealand's juniors win the World Under-20 title in 2015.

Scott Hansen, one of Robertson's assistant coaches with both the Crusaders and now New Zealand, said he had seen one key change of late. "In all my time with Razor, I have never seen him wear a watch, but he wears one now," said Hansen, hinting that Robertson was less laid back about running late. "Have I seen a change in him? He just keeps getting better. There's a lot of color, a lot of energy." — AFP

## Thai 12-year-old fulfils Olympic skateboard dream

BANGKOK: Five years after stepping on a skateboard for the first time, Vareeraya Sukasem will represent Thailand at the Olympics, aged just 12. Vareeraya, known by her nickname "ST", booked her place in dramatic fashion at a qualifying event in Budapest last month and will be one of the youngest athletes in Paris.

Feeling "pressured and stressed" going into the event—the last chance to qualify—Vareeraya failed to make the final round and headed to doping control thinking her hopes were dashed. "While waiting for my testing result, my mom messaged me: 'ST, you made it to the Olympics!'," she told AFP.

"I was so happy. I screamed in the middle of the room because I was so happy that I had really made it." Vareeraya qualified 18th out of 22 for the women's street skateboarding event, which will be held in the French capital's Place de la Concorde on July 28. Skateboarding, split into park and street events, made its Olympics debut at Tokyo three years ago, with skaters judged on the height and difficulty of their tricks.

### British idol

Vareeraya's journey to Paris began aged seven, when her mother took her to a new skate park near their home in Bangkok. The youngster thought she was going to rollerblade, but her mother Tulraya Chantawong, a singer and former contestant on The Voice Thailand, had other ideas.

"My mother lied to me and said that they didn't allow rollerblades, only skateboards," she said. "I did not like it at first. I was like 'why do I have to skate. It's difficult.'" But under the guidance of older skaters, and her mother, Vareeraya soon caught the bug. "I saw other skaters get their board on the ramp, and I was like 'is that hard?'" she said. "I asked them to teach me the tricks."

Vareeraya's skating idol is Britain's Sky Brown, who snared bronze at Tokyo aged just 13 and will



BANGKOK: This photo taken on June 27, 2024 shows 12-year-old Thai skateboarder Vareeraya Sukasem posing for a photograph ahead of a training session at Hua Mak skate park in Bangkok. — AFP

compete again in Paris. But the pair will not go head-to-head as Brown competes in the in the park event, based on ramps and half-pipes. Vareeraya's street discipline is held on a straight course with stairs and handrails to resemble an urban environment.

### Injury woes

Her journey to the Olympics has been riddled with injuries, not unusual in such a high-risk sport, that sometimes kept her off her board for months at a time. "I hurt myself and had to take a break for around four to six months," she said.

"The longest period was during the pandemic when I couldn't skate anywhere." Despite the setbacks, she continued to hone her skills, often finding inspiration from international skaters during competitions abroad. "The first time I competed outside of the country was in Indonesia," she said.

"In Thailand, I didn't have many skateboarders as idols, so it was a chance to look up to skaters from Japan, China, and the US." Japanese skaters are expected to dominate in Paris as they did in Tokyo, where they took four out of the six women's medals.

Apichat Rutnin, Vice-President of the Thailand Extreme Sports Association, said the target for Vareeraya is to finish in the top 10, out of 22 in her event, and aim higher in future Olympics. "She is proof that young Thai skateboarders can make it on the global stage and to the Olympics," he said. — AFP



Sports

# Malen doubles up as Dutch beat Romania to reach Euro quarters

## Koeman's team squandered opportunities early in second half

MUNICH: The Netherlands swept into their first European Championship quarter-final since 2008 as Donyell Malen scored twice in a 3-0 win over Romania in the last 16 on Tuesday. Cody Gakpo gave the Dutch an early lead but they were unable to convert pressure into a crucial second goal until the Liverpool forward set up Malen with seven minutes remaining in Munich.

Romania were gritty but outclassed, lacking the quality to punish their opponents' profligacy before Malen added his second on the counter in stoppage-time. The victory put the Oranje on course for a quarter-final clash with Turkey or Austria, who beat the Netherlands 3-2 in the group stage.

"We played a good game. I'm very pleased. Especially after the last game we needed a reaction and today was a good step in the right direction," Gakpo said. "We talked a lot about the aggression, the intensity and defending like a team. It was a good step.

"Sacrifice something for each other and work really hard to be at your best. Good game overall." Ronald Koeman's side will need to improve their effectiveness in front of goal should they wish to emulate their manager, who was a player for the Dutch when they won the 1988 Euros on German soil. Koeman said "the only critical point was that it took us too long to score the second one", but praised the performance overall. "We are Dutch, we have to play well. The performance today was outstanding and that's why we have a chance to continue," added the 61-year-old coach.

"This is the level we need. If we drop our level, we won't make the final." Romania coach Edward Iordanescu said his team "tried to surprise the

Netherlands today and it worked—until the 20th minute," but added he saw "good things that can inspire us for the future".

### Gakpo sparks Oranje surge

Prior to the game, Netherlands' captain Virgil van Dijk said his side lacked energy and the "will to win" in the loss to Austria. But the Dutch were still strangely flat in the early stages despite Van Dijk's rallying cry.

Group E winners Romania, whose 3-0 victory over Ukraine in their opening game, was just their second-ever win in the Euros, pinned the Dutch back early. Romania went close when Dennis Man latched onto a superb diagonal ball from Nicolae Stanciu, but the Parma winger blasted over.

The Dutch broke Romania's momentum shortly after when Gakpo got on the end of a sweeping move to open the scoring on 20 minutes. Jerdy Schouten sliced a perfect, long pass through the midfield to Xavi Simons, who found Gakpo on the left flank.

Gakpo eluded Andrei Ratiu and seemed to catch goalkeeper Florin Nita off-guard, blasting in at the near post. The goal ignited a period of Dutch dominance, Stefan de Vrij heading inches wide five minutes later. The Netherlands wasted a perfect chance to double their lead with half-time approaching when Denzel Dumfries picked Bogdan Racovitan's pocket and found Simons, who got tangled up and failed to get a decent shot away.

Koeman's team squandered an array of opportunities early in the second half. Memphis Depay and Van Dijk went agonizingly close before Gakpo's second was ruled out by VAR for offside. With every missed chance, the nerves in the Dutch camp seemed to



MUNICH: Netherlands' forward #11 Cody Gakpo shoots past Romania's midfielder #18 Razvan Marin during the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 football match between Romania and the Netherlands at the Munich Football Arena in Munich. — AFP

grow, but Romania lacked the quality to truly punish them. Gakpo, the player of the match, took matters into his own hands with seven minutes remaining, dribbling through a crowded penalty area and finding Malen who tapped home. "We work very hard with each other to do our best and I'm happy I could assist Donnie with his goal today," Gakpo said.

With Romania launching a final attack, Malen broke through on the counter and slid the ball into the goal in the fourth minute of stoppage-time to seal the victory. The 93rd-minute goal meant substitute Malen was the first Dutch player to score at least two goals in a Euros knock-out tie since Marc Overmars and Patrick Kluyvert in a 6-1 win against Yugoslavia in 2000. — AFP

## Euro 2024 head into quarters

STUTTGART: Euro 2024's quarter-finals kick-off on Friday with a blockbuster match between hosts Germany and Spain as the tournament heads towards its decisive final week. Here AFP looks at the state of play with some of the Euro's heavy hitters facing off in the least eight:

### Big boys clash

Germany's clash with Spain in Stuttgart pits the Euros' two best performing sides against one another at least one round earlier than fans would have liked, due to an unbalanced knockout bracket which has four serious candidates for overall victory on one side. The winner of Friday's tie will face either Portugal or France, both former European champions and teams packed with players from the continent's biggest clubs, in the semi-finals. Meanwhile England face Switzerland on Saturday after having scraped past Slovakia—ranked 45th in the world—in the last 16 and find themselves in the last eight having played way below expectations in each of their four matches.

### Big name flops

The Euros has brought together some of the best footballers on the planet but none of the biggest stars have shone so far as the big teams—Spain and Germany apart—have mostly been below-par. Cristiano Ronaldo looks like he's gone one tournament too far while Kylian Mbappe has just a group stage penalty to his name and is a long way from the phenomenal form which won him the golden boot at the last World Cup. England pair Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane, respectively La Liga player of the year and the Bundesliga top scorer, have played way below expectations despite scoring all four of England's goals.

### Young guns & ageing icons

Records have fallen in Germany at both ends of the age spectrum. Spain winger Lamine Yamal, 16, is dazzling in Germany having become the youngest player ever to feature at a European Championship. Should he strike in the quarter-finals or beyond, he will become the youngest scorer in the tournament's history. By contrast Croatia's Luka Modric set a new record for the oldest at 38 by netting against Italy and Portugal duo Ronaldo, 39, and Pepe, 41, could yet surpass the Real Madrid midfield maestro. Pepe is now the oldest-ever Euros player and Portugal are among 12 of the 24 teams whose record for oldest Euros player record was set at this tournament.

### Own goals on fire

While the continent's star strikers have failed to fire,

there have been nine own goals at this Euros and the record of 11 set at the last championships three years ago looks sure to be broken. Prior to Euro 2020 there had just been 11 in the tournament's history. UEFA's looser application of what constitutes an own goal has played its part but there have been some spectacular efforts in Germany. The most comical came in Turkey's 3-0 thumping at the hands of Portugal, when Samet Akaydin unwittingly doubled the deficit by playing a sloppy back pass which ended with Zeki Celik and goalkeeper Altay Bayindir bundling into the net in a vain attempt to keep the ball out. The majority, though, have come from dangerous crosses, like Riccardo Calafiori handing Spain a 1-0 win over Spain in one of the

## UEFA investigates Turkey's Demiral for far-right gesture

BERLIN: UEFA said Wednesday it had opened a probe into Turkey defender Merih Demiral for celebrating a goal in the team's 2-1 win against Austria at Euro 2024 with an allegedly ultra-nationalist salute. The tournament organizer said in a statement it was investigating the player for "inappropriate behavior" during Tuesday's knockout game in Leipzig.

The gesture, which Demiral made to the crowd after scoring his second goal of the game, is associated with Turkish ultra-nationalist group Grey Wolves. Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser on Wednesday condemned the Turkish player's goal celebration. "The symbols of Turkish right-wing extremists have no place in our stadiums," Faeser said on X, formerly Twitter. "Using the European football championships as a platform for racism is completely unacceptable," she added.

Speaking after the game in Leipzig, Demiral said there was no "hidden message" in his celebration. "The way I celebrated had something to do with my Turkish identity," said Demiral, who was man of the match after scoring both Turkey's goals.

"We are all Turks, I am very proud to be Turkish and that is the meaning of this gesture." The defender said he saw Turkish supporters in the stands using the salute. "I just wanted to demonstrate how happy I am and how proud I am," Demiral said, adding that he hoped there would be "even more opportunities to show this gesture." The Grey Wolves is regarded as the militant wing of Turkey's Movement Party (MHP) and has been banned in France and Austria, but not in Germany. The group advocated radical ideas and used violence in the 1980s against leftist activists and ethnic minorities. Germany's agriculture minister Cem Ozdemir said "nothing about the wolf salute is hidden". The symbol "stands for terror (and) fascism", said Ozdemir, one of the most prominent German politicians with Turkish roots, on X. Following the last-16 clash, the Society for Threatened Peoples, a German human rights organization, called on UEFA to crack down on use of the wolf salute.

The gesture was "a symbol of oppression and persecution", the NGO's Middle East lead Kamal Sido said in a statement. Separately, Austrian forward Michael Gregoritsch also called on fans to distance themselves from "right-wing ideology". Supporters of the Austrian team were reported during the game to have sung racist lyrics to the tune of popular dance track "L'Amour Toujours" by Italian DJ Gigi D'Agostino. The chant—which includes the line "foreigners out"—recently caused controversy in Germany after a widely shared clip showed a group of young people singing it on a bar terrace. — AFP



BLANKENHAIN: England's defender #03 Luke Shaw (L), England's midfielder #11 Phil Foden (2nd R) and England's defender #02 Kyle Walker (R) take part in a training session at team's base camp, the Weimar Land golf resort, near Blankenhain, on July 3, 2024. — AFP

most-anticipated games of the group stage. Spain's Robin Le Normand, Czech defender Robin Hranac and Austria's Maximilian Woeber all found their own net in similar fashion as attempted clearances to low crosses have gone wrong.

The plodding, static performances of France, Belgium, England and Portugal—FIFA's four highest ranked sides before the tournament—have been offset by some brilliant underdog showings. Despite being the lowest-ranked team Georgia's run to the last 16 lit up the tournament, particularly their 2-0 victory over Euro 2016 winners Portugal. Romania had won just one of their 16 games at the championships heading into Euro 2024 but topped a group featuring Belgium, Ukraine and Slovakia, before going down to the Netherlands in the last 16. Turkey have however emerged as the tournament's true dark horses, booking a spot in the quarter finals with a brilliant 2-1 win over fellow upstarts Austria on Tuesday. Vincenzo Montella's Turkey and Georgia also played the best game of the group stage, a 3-1 win for the Turks in front of a pulsating crowd in Dortmund. — AFP



PARIS: (FILES) Brazilian football legend Pele speaks during a meeting with Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and France national football team forward Kylian Mbappe at the Hotel Lutetia in Paris on April 2, 2019.—AFP

## Brazil creates King Pele Day in honor of football icon

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil football legend Pele will be honored in his home country by a commemorative day baptized "King Pele Day", reported Tuesday's edition of the government gazette. Considered by many the greatest footballer of all time, Edson Arantes do Nascimento—better known as Pele—won three World Cups with Brazil and scored more than 1,000 goals over his storied career.

"King Pele Day" will be held on November 19 -- the date on which the striker scored his 1,000th goal in a match for boyhood club Santos at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana Stadium in 1969. Pele's goal came from the penalty spot in a 2-1 win against Vasco da Gama, and the match was momentarily interrupted as supporters invaded the pitch to celebrate O Rei's (The King's) achievement.

The Tres Coracoes-native dedicated his landmark goal to the "poor children of Brazil". The following year, he won the last of his three World Cups as part of the legendary 1970 Brazil team. Pele died on December 29, 2022, aged 82. His passing was marked by a period of national mourning and tributes to the sporting icon from across the globe. The law creating the commemorative date was promulgated by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

Kaizen center	25716707
Fawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764

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

### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, **Santan Francis Ferrao**, holder of Indian Passport No. S0586990, do hereby change my name to Santana Francisco (as given name) Ferrao (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Santana Francisco Ferrao and I will also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5630, 03/07/2024)

I, **Mahesh Kumar**, holder of passport No. R5452716 do hereby change my name to Manish (as given name) Patel (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name Manish Patel and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (#5629, 02/07/2024)

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## Turkey set up Euros quarters with Dutch



LEIPZIG: Turkey's forward #21 Baris Alper Yilmaz (C) kicks to goal past Austria's defender #02 Maximilian Woeber during the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 football match between Austria and Turkey at the Leipzig Stadium in Leipzig on July 2, 2024. — AFP

LEIPZIG: Turkey will face the Netherlands in the quarter-finals of Euro 2024 after winning a

thriller with Austria 2-1 as both countries reached the last eight of a European Championship for the first time since 2008. Merih Demiral was the unlikely hero for Turkey, in soaking Leipzig, after bundling his team ahead with less than a minute on the clock and then thumping in the decisive header just before the hour mark.

Vincenzo Montella's side, who were missing suspended captain Hakan Calhanoglu but once again backed by massive support at the Zentralstadion, will take on the Dutch in Berlin on Saturday after their comfortable 3-0 win over Romania earlier on Tuesday.

Turkey will be able to count on their raucous fans in the German capital as they aim to replicate their run to the last four from 16 years ago. That tournament was co-hosted by Austria, who played a full part in an engrossing match and on another day may have run out winners.

Ralf Rangnick's side were on top for most of the match and in particular in the second half, when they pinned Turkey back and conceded the second goal completely against the run of play. Al-Ahli centre-back Demiral became the first European defender to score twice in the knockout stages of a major tournament since Lilian Thuram for France at the 1998 World Cup.

Michael Gregoritsch halved the deficit by forcing home Stefan Posch's flick on at another corner shortly after Demiral took his international goal tally to four in 48 caps. But Austria couldn't capitalize on their dominance and went out after Christoph Baumgartner was denied a leveller in the final seconds of added time by an incredible Mert Gunok save. "I

believe if the game had gone into extra-time we would have won the game because the Turkish team were exhausted and we had a physical advantage," Rangnick told reporters.

Cody Gakpo and Donyell Malen, with a brace in the second half, eased the Dutch through to the last eight. Ronald Koeman's side were heavily criticized after the 3-2 defeat to Austria which led the Oranje to finish third in Group D.

But they were impressive on Tuesday, creating a hatful of chances and running out deserved winners in at the Allianz Arena. "We showed a good reaction from the last match and I'm very pleased... We took a step in the right direction today," said Liverpool forward Gakpo.

"It's all about aggression and intensity and defending like a team and I think it was a good step and an important one." Gakpo was the Netherlands' most impressive performer and put his team ahead in the 20th minute when his rasping shot caught goalkeeper Florin Nita off-guard at his near post.

Chances came and went as Romania failed to get hold of their opponents and after having what would have been his second ruled out for offside he took matters into his own hands with seven minutes remaining.

Gakpo's mazy dribble through a crowded penalty area led to him finding Malen who tapped home and then added the third in stoppage time to make the scoreline more representative of the balance of play. "The only critical point was that it took us too long to score the second one," said Koeman.

"We are Dutch, we have to play well. The performance today was outstanding and that's why we have a chance to continue." Whoever wins between the Netherlands and Turkey will play one of England and Switzerland a week on Wednesday. — AFP

## Brazil held by Colombia in Copa America

SANTA CLARA: Colombia came from behind to grab a 1-1 draw with Brazil on Tuesday, ensuring their qualification to the Copa America quarter-finals as group winners. An equalizer from Daniel Munoz in first half stoppage time was enough to earn Colombia a share of the spoils after Raphinha had fired Brazil into the lead with a sublime 12th-minute free-kick at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.

The result means Colombia advance to the knockout rounds as winners of Group D, where they will face Group C runners-up Panama in Glendale, Arizona, on Saturday. But Tuesday's draw means Brazil will face a titanic showdown in Las Vegas on Saturday against arch-rivals Uruguay, winners of Group D with a perfect record. Brazil goalscorer Raphinha insisted the five-time world champions would be unfazed at the prospect of playing Uruguay. "Our team is evolving with each game, with each training session and we think we're on the right track," Raphinha said.

"Unfortunately it wasn't the result we wanted, and it wasn't the position that we wanted to qualify for the quarter-finals in. "But whoever wants to be champion shouldn't be worrying about who they play in the next round; we have to be prepared for anyone. "If we want to win this competition we have to be prepared to play our best."

Brazil will head into the quarter-finals without

Real Madrid star Vinicius Jr, who picked up his second yellow card of the tournament for a reckless early foul on James Rodriguez on Tuesday. Colombia playmaker Rodriguez had alarm bells ringing amongst Brazil fans from the ensuing free-kick, just clipping the top of the bar with goalkeeper Alisson beaten.

But although Colombia made the smoother start it was Brazil who took the lead after 12 minutes, with Raphinha curling a sensational free-kick into the top corner to make it 1-0. Colombia however continued to threaten, Rodriguez volleying over the bar on the turn after 16 minutes.

Rodriguez thought he had set up Colombia's equalizer three minutes later, supplying a pinpoint cross from a free-kick on the turn for Davinson Sanchez to home. The goal was ruled out for offside after a VAR review. Tempers threatened to boil over midway through the first half, and Venezuelan referee Jesus Valenzuela issued three yellow cards in quick succession to Colombia's Deiver Machado and Jefferson Lerma along with Brazil's Joao Gomes.

Colombia looked the more assured side throughout the first half and in stoppage time their slick play got its reward, with Crystal Palace wing back Munoz blasting home after being released by a superb pass from veteran forward Jhon Cordoba.

Colombia - who have now gone 26 international games unbeaten since a defeat to Argentina in early 2022 - looked comfortable through the second half and should have wrapped up victory in the final minutes only for substitute Rafael Borre to shoot over from eight yards with the goal gaping. In Tuesday's other Group D game Costa Rica defeated Paraguay 2-1 in Austin to finish in third place. — AFP



SANTA CLARA: Brazil's forward #11 Raphinha fights for the ball with Colombia's defender #23 Davinson Sanchez during the Conmebol 2024 Copa America tournament group D football match between Brazil and Colombia at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. — AFP

## Alcaraz, Sinner eye Wimbledon third round

LONDON: World number one Jannik Sinner takes on Italian compatriot and former runner-up Matteo Berrettini for a place in the Wimbledon third round on Wednesday. Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz and four-time major winner Naomi Osaka also target places in the last 32. Alcaraz faces a man who once defeated him in a Grand Slam qualifier while Osaka's rival is the daughter of an American billionaire. AFP Sport looks at three matches to watch on day three of the tournament:

### Sinner faces all-Italian duel

Italian men's tennis has rarely been stronger, with the country boasting five players in the top 50 while the nation swept to Davis Cup glory last season. Ten Italian men started the singles tournament this year at Wimbledon.

Jannik Sinner was the first Italian man to capture a Grand Slam title with his victory at the Australian Open in January and was also the

first from his country to become world number one. Matteo Berrettini can boast his own breakthrough Italian moment when he was the first to make a Wimbledon men's final in 2021, where his run was ended by Novak Djokovic.

Sinner, who made the semi-finals at the All England Club last year, defeated Berrettini in their only previous meeting at the Masters-level event in Canada last year. "I think his secret is that he is really hungry for improvement. That's his secret. And the humbleness that he has about it. He's just special," said Berrettini of his compatriot.

### Alcaraz eyes revenge

Third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz is bidding to become just the sixth man after Rod Laver, Bjorn Borg, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic to win the French Open and Wimbledon titles back to back. He defeated dreadlocked Estonian qualifier Mark Lajal in the first round on Monday as he started his bid for a fourth Grand Slam title after adding last year's Wimbledon to his 2022 US Open breakthrough.

Aleksandar Vukic enjoyed an impressive run to the semi-finals of the Eastbourne grass-court tournament last week after only making the main draw as a lucky loser from qualifying. The 28-year-old Australian, ranked at 69 in the world, was born in Sydney after his parents fled Montenegro during

the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

He booked his date with Alcaraz the hard way, saving a match point in a five-set triumph over Sebastian Ofner, facing down 24 aces and 72 winners from the Austrian. Vukic can boast one career win over Alcaraz - he came out on top against the then 17-year-old Spaniard in the first round of qualifying for the 2020 French Open.

### Osaka seeks stress-free day

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka defeated Diane Parry of France in the first round to register her first win at Wimbledon since 2018. Former world number one Osaka, still feeling her way back on tour after giving birth to daughter Shai last July, fired 34 winners past Parry on a surface that should be the perfect fit for her powerful game.

"It felt really fun and really stressful at the same time," said 113th-ranked Osaka, whose last appearance at Wimbledon in 2019 had ended in a first round exit. On Wednesday, the Japanese star takes on America's 17th-ranked Emma Navarro, who arrived in London on the back of a semi-final run at the Bad Homburg grass-court tournament.

Navarro has high achievement in the genes - her father Ben Navarro is a former vice-president of banking giant Citigroup. Forbes recently estimated his worth at \$1.5 billion. — AFP



Carlos Alcaraz