

R₊
RIDE SAFE

BOOK YOUR RIDE NOW

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

@ridesafe.app

4 Spotlight on US-Kuwait ties at US Embassy media roundtable

7 Trump scrambles to contain fallout of abortion, IVF rows

11 Syrian artist destroys statue outside UN in political stunt

14 Djokovic stunned by Popyrin after Alcaraz, Osaka crash out

Gaza 2.0: Zionists target West Bank

Zionists kill dozens in besieged Strip as polio vaccination campaign begins



(Left) A Palestinian man collects salvageable items as a fire breaks out in a fruit market in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin during ongoing Zionist raids on Aug 31, 2024. (Right) A nurse administers polio vaccine drops to a Palestinian child at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Aug 31, 2024. — AFP photos

JENIN/GAZA: The Zionist entity pressed on with a large-scale military operation in the occupied West Bank against Palestinian fighters for a fourth day Saturday, as fierce fighting raged in the nearly 11-month Gaza war. Despite the clashes in Gaza, a local health official in the Hamas-run territory said polio vaccinations had begun there.

The World Health Organization says the Zionist entity has agreed to a series of three-day "humanitarian pauses" to facilitate a mass vaccination campaign after the first confirmed case in Gaza in 25 years, although officials had said it was expected to begin on Sunday. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that the pauses are "not a ceasefire". The campaign follows confirmation last week that a baby was partially paralyzed by the type 2 poliovirus, the first such case in the territory in 25 years.

An unspecified number of children received the first dose of the vaccination, which involves two doses and is administered orally, at Nasser Hospital

Continued on Page 6

NEWS IN BRIEF

Army chief inspects military units

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain inspected several military units and sites Saturday morning. During his tour, Muzain stressed the importance of maintaining peak combat readiness and sharp vigilance, as highlighted in a press statement. He commended the relentless efforts of the army personnel, commended their high level of preparedness and underscored the need for continued commitment to safeguard the nation's security and stability. — KUNA

'Kuwaitis for Jerusalem' established

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Amthal Al-Huwailah approved the establishment of the 'Kuwaitis for Jerusalem Charity Society', a charitable organization whose main duty is to "promote social and cultural solidarity between the Kuwaiti and Palestinian people".

Kuwait Times and Gulf Bank conclude Summer Program

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times concluded the third edition of its Summer Program in partnership with Gulf Bank, held from August 4 to 31, 2024. The four-week program provided 20 students with hands-on experience in journalism, including news production, reporting, photography and social media. The students also visited Gulf Bank and CODED to learn about public relations and the application of AI in journalism.

Various lectures and workshops were conducted by Kuwait Times staff, covering topics like journalism basics, content creation and social media strategies. The program culminated in the students producing their own newspaper issue. Upon completion, participants received certificates and had their work published in the Kuwait Times. (See Pages 2 & 3)



Iraq-US raid kills 15 IS fighters

BAGHDAD: A joint operation by US and Iraqi forces killed 15 Islamic State group fighters in Iraq's western desert, with seven US troops hurt during the operation, US Central Command said. The raid targeted IS leaders and was carried out early Thursday morning, resulting "in the death of 15 ISIS operatives" with "no indication of civilian casualties", CENTCOM said. Five US troops were wounded during the raid and another two injured in falls, a defense official said. — AFP

Minister, Chinese delegation visit Mubarak Port

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Noura Al-Mashaan paid an inspection visit on Saturday to the site of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project on Boubyan Island, along with senior state officials and a visiting Chinese delegation. The visit comes within the framework of Amiri directives on speeding up the implementation of the project with the aim of creating a safe corridor and a commercial center in the region, Mashaan told KUNA.

The visit is part of activating the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed



6,200 murders in S Africa in 3 months

JOHANNESBURG: Nearly 6,200 people were murdered in South Africa between April and June, police figures showed Friday. Police Minister Senzo Mchunu said that 6,198 people were murdered during the three months, a 0.5-percent decrease over the same period a year earlier. The country recorded a total of 9,309 rapes between April and June, an increase of 0.6 percent. Police also said there were 44,735 drug-related crimes detected. — AFP

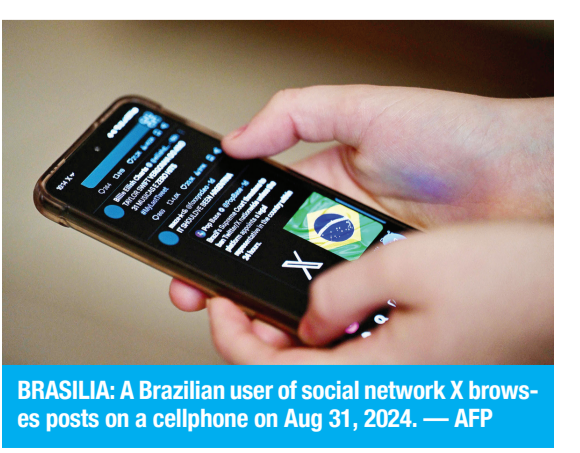
Brazil blocks X after judge's order

BRASILIA: A block on Elon Musk's X social network in Brazil started to take effect early Saturday after a Supreme Court judge ordered its suspension, according to AFP. Brazilian Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes on Friday ordered the suspension of the platform following a months-long standoff with the tech billionaire over disinformation in South America's largest nation. Moraes handed down the ruling after Musk failed to comply with an order to

name a new legal representative for the company.

Early Saturday access to X, formerly known as Twitter, was no longer possible for some users in the South American country, who were presented with a message asking them to reload the browser without being able to log in successfully. Musk, who also owns Tesla and SpaceX, reacted with fury to the judge's order, branding Moraes an "evil dictator cosplaying as a judge" and accusing him of "trying to destroy democracy in Brazil". "Free speech is the bedrock of democracy and an unelected pseudo-judge in Brazil is destroying it for political purposes," the billionaire, who has become increasingly aligned with right-wing politics, wrote on X.

Continued on Page 6





Kuwait Times Summer Program students pose for a group photo with Kuwait Times/Kuwait News and Gulf Bank teams. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Gulf Bank and Kuwait Times successfully conclude 3rd edition of Summer Program

Students gain valuable insights into journalism and artificial intelligence

By Faten Omar

Kuwait Times, the first English-language newspaper in the Arabian Gulf, established in 1961, concluded the third edition of its Summer Program for 2024, which was held in strategic partnership with Gulf Bank from August 4 to 31, 2024. During the four-week course, 20 students were exposed to different work processes in journalism, and they were diligent, hardworking and result-oriented.

The Kuwait Times team enhanced participants' knowledge and skills in news production, reporting, photography, and social media. By focusing on practical applications and hands-on training, they equipped aspiring journalists with the tools needed to elevate their storytelling abilities. Through this comprehensive training, students learned how to effectively use their talents to craft compelling and impactful stories, ensuring that they are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the evolving media landscape.

The students of the KT Summer Program embarked on an enlightening field trip to Gulf Bank, a leading bank in Kuwait, established in 1960. During the visit, the students gained valuable insights into the operations of the bank's Public Relations department. They were shown how the team creates events, videos, and posts for social media, highlighting the strategies and techniques used to engage with the public and maintain the bank's strong presence in the digital world.

Also, students went to CODED where they were introduced to AI and how to



Summer Program students take a group photo with Kuwait Times and Kuwait News teams.

use it in journalism. During a workshop by Nawaf Al-Mutairi, they were taught how to use AI tools and prompt engineering to improve their reporting and storytelling. The workshop focused on practical applications of AI, including generating content, editing, and avoiding AI-induced errors like hallucinations and fabrications.

During the Summer Program, several lectures were held by the Kuwait Times team. In the first week, Deputy Managing Editor Faten Omar and reporter Passant Hisham explained basics of journalism including how to collect, verify and deliver news to the public, in addition to how to prioritize stories

that matter to the audience while adhering to ethical standards. Students were also offered a class on "How a Daily Newspaper is Produced", providing a step-by-step explanation of the work process at Kuwait Times and the roles played by various staff members, by Managing Editor Shakir Reshamwala.



Kuwait Times Deputy Managing Editor Faten Omar and Gulf Bank Communications Manager Sarah Al-Helal honor Jiye Back.



Ahmed Bin Hussain is honored.



Lolwah Salem is honored.



Saud Alzanki is honored.



Hussain AlSalman is honored.



Zainah Alsaree is honored.



Essa Haitham is honored.



Sara Al-Shaiji is honored.



Batool Albousabih is honored.



Kuwait Times Summer Program students pose for a group photo at Gulf Bank.



Students visit CODED.



Tala Bin Hussain is honored.



Hana Muneer is honored.



Noor Akar is honored.



Alzain Bin Naji is honored.



Lea AlSabah is honored.



Maya Abu Huwajji is honored.



Marwan Hafez is honored.

Meanwhile, Hussain Sana, journalist and content creator, taught students how to be critical as well as how to develop their analytical skills. He gave those tips and hints on how to see the world and how to ask the right questions. Sana also provided them with the forms of writing, where they compared and contrasted between creative writing and writing reports and scripts.

Content creator and archivist Yousef Abu Ghazaleh said choosing regionally significant topics, thematically aligned with their audience's interests, is important. He focused on structuring and bringing ideas to life, where students learned how to create effective video outlines by drawing inspiration from others, storyboarding and bullet-point scripting.

In the final session, students wrote their scripts for their outlined topics and collaborated in pairs to film them, putting theory into practice. Content creator Dhoha Al-Issa gave a class on "FUNDamentals of social media" and let the students dive into the dynamic world of social media while unlocking its hidden secrets and exploring the fundamental pillars of social media success.

Kuwait Times allowed the students to make the newspaper under the supervision of editor Nebal Snan, page makers Rajesh, Zakir Mansoori and Sreenu, and proofreader Sabastian Dsouza. After the successful completion of the course, Kuwait Times provided students with a certificate, in addition to an article published in the newspaper.

At the end of the program,



Sameeha Haque is honored.



Zainb Abbas is honored.



Gulf Bank Communications Manager Sarah Al-Helal, Kuwait Times/Kuwait News PR and CSR Manager Jana Alnaqeeb and Gulf Bank Chief Marketing Officer Najla Al-Eisa.



Students chat during the ceremony.



Content Creator Hussain Sana teaches students critical thinking skills.



Managing Editor Shakir Reshamwala explains the work process to the students.



Kuwait Times/Kuwait News content creators Yousef Abu Ghazaleh, Zainab Dashti and Hussain Sana.



Content Creator Dhoha Al-Issa interviews one of the students.



One of the students plays the guitar at a ceremony marking the end of the program.



Content Creator Dhoha Al-Issa during the social media class.



Students share a light moment with Kuwait Times' team.



Archivist Yousef Abu Ghazaleh in the archive room with the students.

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 359
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 361
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Turkish ambassador, group of military officials and diplomats engage in discussions.



Turkish ambassador presents a commemorative gift to Major General Khaled Daraj Saad.

Kuwait-Turkey defense partnership bolsters regional peace and security

Embassy marks 102nd anniversary of Turkey's Victory Day

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Defense, Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah, described Kuwaiti-Turkish bilateral relations as excellent, with particular emphasis on their strong military cooperation. His remarks were made during the 102nd anniversary of Turkey's Victory Day, held on Thursday at the Marina Hotel, where he expressed his pleasure at joining "the Turkish allies in their celebrations and joys."

In a press statement made during the event, he said that the recent collaboration between Kuwait's Ministry of Defense and the Turkish defense industry includes unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). He also said that potential future cooperation across various fields is being discussed, though no decisions have been finalized yet. Through the efforts of the Kuwaiti armed forces and in collaboration with allied armies, he added that they are committed to ensuring the security and stability of Kuwait.

During her speech, Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez said that by increasing cooperation especially in the defense sector, both nations share the same vision for achieving regional peace and security. She cited the recent visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait to Turkey and the signing of a government-to-government defense procurement agreement as a key milestone in this collaboration, laying a solid foundation for future partnerships.



Major General Khaled Daraj Saad, Commander of the Air Defense Force engages in a conversation with the Turkish ambassador during the event.



Sheikh Dr Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah is pictured alongside a respected Kuwaiti official during the event.

Concluding her remarks, Ambassador Sonmez added that defense cooperation is not merely a matter of foreign trade. Instead, she said, "supplying our friendly countries with affordable, sophisticated, and durable products and solutions benefits our bilateral ties and fosters greater security partnerships."

The ongoing crisis in Gaza was also addressed in her speech, with a call for the international community to take decisive action to end the violence. Both Turkey and Kuwait reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the Palestinian cause and advocating for a just and lasting peace.



Guests and dignitaries gather at Marina Hotel to celebrate the 102nd anniversary of Turkey's Victory Day.

MoH uses new tech to treat glaucoma

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced on Saturday that it has used one of the latest techniques (microsurgeries) to treat glaucoma. This is a new medical success in eye surgeries that is added to the record of successes achieved by the health system in the country. Head of the Ophthalmology Department at Farwaniya Hospital, Dr Yousef Al-Harz, said that the surgery was performed by Dr Abdullah Al-Kandari, a glaucoma specialist.

He implanted the modern EyeWatch System, which is one of the latest global technologies used to

treat glaucoma. Dr Al-Harz stressed that this surgery is a continuation of the MoH's policy of adding all that is new in terms of medicines, consumables, and surgical tools to enhance the ability of doctors to provide the best treatments and improve the quality of health services provided.

For his part, Dr Al-Kandari pointed out that the device is distinguished by its superior ability to control the drainage of eye fluid with high accuracy, which allows doctors to control eye pressure more effectively and efficiently, as initial studies have shown that it reduces eye pressure effectively. He explained that the device reduces potential complications after surgery, and preliminary studies also indicate that it reduces patients' need to use drops after surgery by a large percentage, as it was noted that the need for drops decreased by a percentage. — KUNA



Medics use a new technique to treat glaucoma. — KUNA photos



Glaucoma Specialist Dr Abdullah Al-Kandari is pictured during the surgery.

Summit focuses on ties, economic and social issues

CAIRO: The preparatory meetings for the 114th regular session of the Arab Economic and Social Council will kick off at the headquarters of the Arab League Secretariat on Sunday. The summit is scheduled to be held on Thursday to discuss Arab cooperation, economic and social issues, with the participation of Kuwait.

The preparatory meetings will start with a meeting of the Social Committee, which will discuss a number of topics in the social file, including the Arab Strategy for Lifelong Learning, the role of social support in achieving equity and equal opportunities in learning, the Second Arab Decade for Literacy and Adult Education, and Arab-international cooperation in the social and development fields, in addition to reports of ministerial councils and specialized committees and their decisions. The Social Committee will also present an item on the culture and green future initiative and another item on a proposal to establish volunteer centers for youth and retirees to serve the elderly.

In the same context, the Economic Committee will hold its meetings on Monday and Tuesday, where it will discuss the topics included in the economic file, including the Arab Food Security Status Report for 2023, follow-up on the implementation of the Arab Program for Sustainable Food Security, follow-up on the implementation of the Arab Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy (2020-2030), follow-up on the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Management of Pastoral Resources (2020-2040), and follow-up on the implementation of the Arab Aquaculture Strategy (2018-2037).

The Economic Committee will also discuss topics related to organizations and institutions of joint Arab action, reports and decisions of ministerial councils and committees, the Space Initiative, and developing the performance of specialized Arab organizations, in addition to a proposal to establish the Arab Housing and Reconstruction Bank. — KUNA



US Ambassador Karen Sasahara

US media roundtable: Spotlight on US-Kuwait military, economic ties

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: The US Ambassador invited the Kuwait Times, along with other newspapers, to a roundtable at the US Embassy in Kuwait. During the event, a range of questions were posed, and discussions took place with the Ambassador of the US in Kuwait, Karen Sasahara. The ambassador spoke about the US plan to spend its strategic partnership with Gulf countries with the evolving political landscape and increased tensions in the Middle East.

"Regarding the strategic partnership today, you can observe our significant presence in the media. We are actively engaged in the region, with our two carrier groups stationed here and a strong presence in the Red Sea. We maintain regular contact with our Kuwaiti partners, including both military and civilian channels. This includes ongoing exchanges of information and perspectives to prevent escalation. Our partnership is characterized by constant communication and collaboration."

She touched upon the strong military cooperation between Kuwait and the US. "Our partnership with Kuwait, solidified since the liberation, has evolved significantly over the years. The relationship was further strengthened in 2004 when Kuwait was designated a Major Non-NATO Ally, and we're celebrating 20 years of this status. With the NATO ICI center in Kuwait since 2017 and a substantial US military presence, our commitment remains strong. We maintain an open, honest dialogue and continuously consult each other on regional and broader issues."

Sasahara further elaborated on the US commitment to keeping the Kuwaiti army well equipped and well trained: "In June, we held a joint military commission in Kuwait, which demonstrates our strong commitment. A significant delegation from Washington participated, including senior representatives who met with Kuwait's Minister of Defense. This allowed for detailed discussions on current issues and future security plans. Our partnership involves ongoing dialogue, daily interactions, and regular updates between our military attaché in Kuwait and the Ministry of Defense. We highly value Kuwaiti perspectives on regional and broader security matters."

Regarding fear of wider conflict, she said: "From day one, we've worked to prevent escalation by coordinating closely with all parties. Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense trips, along with President Biden's calls with regional leaders, aim to maintain stability. Despite regional actors and proxies trying to heighten tensions, including Houthi attacks, our strong GCC partnership remains united against such actions, ensuring the situation stays de-escalated."

Moreover, the roundtable discussed investment opportunities for American businesses in Kuwait and any major steps the embassy is taking to facilitate these opportunities. "There are many opportunities for American businesses in Kuwait, including in infrastructure (like roads and power generation), healthcare (such as nursing and surgical services), and higher education. Kuwaitis often seek specialized medical care in the US, so there are opportunities to enhance these relationships. Additionally, fields like media and art also offer potential."

The US Foreign Commercial Service helps Kuwaiti businesses explore opportunities in various sectors through programs like SelectUSA, which connects foreign investors with US businesses and local governments." Sasahara also spoke about the numbers of Kuwaiti students this year and the tourist visas. "We're still gathering data, but currently, we have about 6,000 Kuwaiti students in the US, including many returning students and new arrivals."

This number is likely to increase as applications and enrollments continue. Kuwaiti students are attending various institutions across the US, with a notable concentration in Boston. Our "Take a Step" program supports their educational journey. Tourism is also strong, with many Kuwaiti tourists exploring various destinations from California to New York. We're continuously monitoring these trends to better understand their interests and experiences."



In rural Georgia, evangelicals all in for Trump

Russian mercenaries pulled out of Burkina Faso to defend Kursk

Page 6

Page 7



A Palestinian woman stands in the doorway of her house along a street from which Zionist bulldozers dug out the asphalt, in the Nur Shams refugee camp near Tulkarem on August 30, 2024. — AFP photos

Palestinians in shock after Zionists raid West Bank

‘(Zionists) want the people to turn against the resistance, but that will not happen’

NUR SHAMS CAMP, Palestine: Palestinian residents of the Zionist-occupied West Bank expressed shock and despair Friday at the outcome of a Zionist raid on their refugee camp: bullet-riddled walls, destroyed homes and piles of concrete blocks. “We are another Gaza, especially in the refugee camps,” said Nayef Alaajmeh, a resident of the Nur Shams camp in the city of Tulkarem, as he surveyed the damage following a devastating Zionist raid on the camp that ended late on Thursday.

The Zionist military is officially forbidden from entering West Bank cities and refugee camps, which are autonomous zones under the control of the Palestinian Authority. On Wednesday, Zionist forces launched a widespread “counter-terrorism” operation in several West Bank cities and refugee camps, including Nur Shams. At least 19 Palestinians have been killed so far in the raids, according to the Zionist forces and the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah. The majority of those killed were militants.

The Zionist military initially sent bulldozers to tear up tarmac streets, sending clouds of dust over the targeted areas.

AFP footage showed camp residents walking cautiously through streets littered with burnt tires and other debris.

Municipality workers and residents were already at work trying to salvage what they could. Many residents compared the devastation to that in Gaza, where nearly 11 months of war have left much of the Palestinian territory destroyed. “Today, we are just like Gaza, war or no war ... (but) we are steadfast and the people of Gaza are also steadfast,” said Nabil Abu Shala, another resident of Nur Shams camp.

Fuad Kanuh, who runs a shop on the ground floor of the building where he lives, said gas cylinders exploded during the raid, apparently hit by explosives. Almost everything in the shop is now charred and blackened by soot, but that did not stop Kanuh from pulling out what he could — an air conditioning unit and a television hanging from a wall.

‘Pressure on resistance’

Nur Shams has nevertheless been a regular target of Zionist raids. Members of armed groups in the camp no longer wear face masks to conceal their identities,



NUR SHAMS: A Palestinian boy inspects the damage the morning after a Zionist air strike in the Nur Shams camp for Palestinian refugees in the Zionist-occupied West Bank on August 27, 2024.

as they consider themselves to be “on the path to martyrdom”. They are often targeted by Zionist armored vehicles, snipers or drones.

Violence in the West Bank has soared since October 7. But even before that, the West Bank, occupied by the Zionist entity since 1967, has always been under Zionist attack. In the 10 months preceding Octo-

ber 7, the United Nations recorded 200 Palestinians killed by Zionist soldiers and settlers in the West Bank, which at the time was the highest toll during a period of that length since it began compiling such data in 2005.

Since October 7, around 640 Palestinians have been killed in the territory, according to the UN.

Three million Palestinians live in the West Bank, as well as half a million Zionist Jews in settlements considered illegal under international law. “The occupation forces have destroyed the infrastructure and vandalized the roads, property and cars,” militant Abu Mohammed told AFP. “They even demolished and vandalized the mosque.”

In Al-Faraa refugee camp in the nearby city of Tubas, Mohammed Mansur, a member of the central committee of the communist People’s Party, attended a funeral of four Palestinians killed on Wednesday during the Zionist raid. “Here too they have carried out many massacres and bombings to put pressure on the resistance,” Mansur said.

“They want the people to turn against the resistance, but that will not happen,” he said, as bodies of those killed, wrapped in Palestinian flags, were laid to rest. Before their burial, the bodies were carried through the camp in a funeral procession, with mourners walking on the streets freshly torn up by Zionist bulldozers. As the procession advanced, young men brandishing automatic rifles fired into the air. — AFP

Jenin ‘cut off from the world’ as Zionist raid drags on

JENIN, Palestine: Concrete slabs and sheet metal were piled high alongside streets in Jenin on Saturday, as residents assessed the damage from the Zionist entity’s latest West Bank raid even as explosions persisted nearby. The scars of ongoing clashes in the occupied Palestinian territory, which began on Wednesday as part of what the entity has described as a counter-terrorism operation, were everywhere: collapsed walls, uprooted trees, tiled roofs covering mounds of rubble.

Bulldozers rumbled through the streets on the first day of the raid, clearing the way for Zionist soldiers while tearing up the asphalt and piercing underground pipes, residents of one neighborhood in east Jenin told AFP. Three days later, with fighting elsewhere in the city continuing, “we are cut off from the world”, Taher Al-Saadi said. “The water is cut off. The electricity is cut off, the sewage system is no longer working. All the infrastructure is destroyed, we no longer have any services that work.” He added: “The bakeries are at a standstill. We can’t find milk for the children.”

Zionist raids are not unusual in Jenin, whose refugee camp is a bastion for armed groups resisting the Zionist occupation. But the operation launched on Wednesday was unusually large and long, hitting multiple West Bank cities at once and, in Jenin, showing no sign of letting up. “I think it’s the worst day since the start of the raid,” Wisam Bakr, director of Jenin Government Hospital, said on Saturday. “We hear from time to time clashes and sometimes there is big bombing.”

‘Dark days’

Not far from where Faiza Abu Jaafar lives, an 82-year-old man was shot dead on Friday by a Zi-



JENIN: A Zionist bulldozer drives as fire breaks out in a fruit market in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin amid ongoing Zionist raids on August 31, 2024. — AFP

onist sniper, residents say, bringing to 20 the number of Palestinians killed in the operation so far. Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad have said at least 13 of the dead were members of their armed wings.

While Zionist military vehicles and bulldozers left the area near her home on Saturday morning, apparently heading for Jenin’s refugee camp, Abu Jaafar said she and her relatives were still shaken. “It’s very hard, for the children and for everyone. We are afraid, we are terrified, look at all the damage,” she said, standing amid piles of rubble. “We are living in dark days.”

Just how dark is still unclear, as Jenin governor Kamal Abu al-Rub told AFP that even he does not know exactly what is happening inside the camp,

where the latest fighting appeared to be concentrated. “The (Zionists) are besieging the hospitals and cutting off the city from the refugee camp, which has become a military zone with no access,” he said. “Neither the civil defense, nor the ambulances, nor the journalists can go and see what is happening there.”

The Zionist army has denied cutting off access to hospitals, saying it has positioned its forces to prevent militants from gathering in them while allowing ambulances to come and go. Zionist military spokesman Nadav Shoshani said the forces involved in the current raid were fewer than the number who carried out a large-scale raid in July 2023 that left 13 dead. — AFP

No oil spilling from tanker set ablaze by Houthis in Red Sea

ATHENS: As salvage operations began on an abandoned Greek-flagged oil tanker with deck fires still burning from Houthi rebel attacks, the EU’s Red Sea naval mission Aspides said on Thursday that no oil spill has been detected. Yemen’s Houthi militants carried out multiple assaults, including planting bombs on the already disabled 900-foot (274.2-meter) Sounion that is laden with about 1 million barrels of oil. On Wednesday, the Iran-aligned militants said they would allow salvage crews to tow the ship — which has been on fire since August 23 — to safety. “It would appear, at least for now, that cooler heads prevailed,” Lars Jensen, CEO of industry consultancy Vespucci Maritime, said on LinkedIn.

The Houthis have sunk two vessels in their 10-month drone and missile campaign against commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The EU mission vowed to “facilitate any courses of action” in coordination with European authorities and neighboring countries to avert a catastrophic environmental crisis and rescue Sounion.

On Thursday, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said the barrels of crude oil on the Sounion were intact, that the vessel itself was leaking some oil from where it was hit, and that multiple fires were still burning. The Houthis’ decision to grant rescue crews safe access to the Sounion came after multiple countries voiced humanitarian and environmental concerns. The move may help avoid what experts warned could be a devastating spill of 150,000 tons of crude oil into the Red Sea. — Reuters

International

Deadly strikes hit Russian, Ukrainian border cities

Kyiv dismisses air force commander a day after a US-made F-16 crashed in combat

KYIV: Aerial strikes on Russian and Ukrainian border cities killed at least a dozen people on Friday and Saturday, bombardments that came as Kyiv dismissed its air force commander in a major military shake-up. Both sides also claimed to have advanced on the battlefield — Moscow in eastern Ukraine and Kyiv in its shock offensive into Russia's western Kursk region — with the fighting showing no sign of subsiding, two and a half years into Russia's invasion.

A Russian guided bomb attack on Saturday killed two people and injured 10 more including children in a village in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, the governor said. Governor Oleh Synchubov said Russian forces hit the village of Cherkaska Lozova with guided bombs, damaging a residential building. "Two women died," he said. "One was pulled from the rubble, the other died in an ambulance." He added that two children were among the injured.

Towns and villages in the northeastern Kharkiv region on the border with Russia have been frequently shelled and bombed by Moscow's forces during the 30 months of the war. A similar Russian attack on the city of Kharkiv, the regional center, killed seven people on Friday, local authorities said.

Emergency workers were still pulling bodies from the rubble late on Friday evening. Images on social media showed the top floors of a multi-story residential building ripped open and a fire raging after the strike. At least 77 were wounded, including 18 children, the emergency services said.

President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Kyiv's Western backers to up their support after the attack, which officials said was with a glide bomb. "We need strong decisions from our partners to stop this terror," Zelensky said in a post on social media. "We need long-range capabilities," he added, referring to Kyiv's appeals to allies to lift restrictions on the use of Western-supplied missiles inside Russian territory and deliver more longer-range weapons. "We

need the implementation of air defense agreements for Ukraine. This is about saving lives," he added.

Belgorod hit

Across the border some 60 kilometers (37 miles) to the north, Russia said Ukraine had fired cluster munitions on the city of Belgorod and its suburbs, killing at least five and wounding 37 civilians, including at least six children. "One woman and four men died of their wounds on the spot before an ambulance arrived," regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said in a post on Telegram.

He posted a video showing a fire raging at a house after one of the strikes. The state-run TASS media agency posted pictures of a road in the city of Belgorod covered in strewn debris and twisted metal. Both Belgorod and Kharkiv have been hit repeatedly with aerial strikes throughout the war. Russian President Vladimir Putin in May launched a new offensive into the Kharkiv region which he said was designed to push Ukrainian forces back to create a "security zone" for Russia's own border settlements.

Moscow's troops also claimed Friday to have captured three more villages in eastern Ukraine — one in the Kharkiv region — as they press against Ukrainian troops facing manpower and ammunition shortages. Ukraine also claimed on Friday to have advanced in Russia's western Kursk region, where it is mounting its own surprise ground offensive, claiming to have captured 100 settlements and more than 1,200 square kilometers of territory since August 6.

Commander fired

Zelensky on Friday dismissed the country's air force chief, a day after Kyiv said a US-made F-16 fighter jet had crashed in combat, killing the pilot. In a video message Zelensky said he had "decided to replace the commander of the air force" to strengthen Ukraine's military leadership. His office earlier



KHARKIV: Ukrainian emergency workers inspect a heavily damaged residential building following a recent missile attack in Kharkiv, on August 31, 2024. — AFP

published a presidential decree to officially remove Mykola Oleshchuk from the post.

The crash of the F-16 was a high-profile setback for Kyiv, which had lobbied the West to send the advanced fighter jet for months. The military had said the plane and pilot crashed during a combat mission earlier this week after having shot down incoming Russian missiles.

Zelensky did not provide further details on why he had decided to replace his air force commander, saying only that his command team "needed to get stronger". Lieutenant General Anatolii Kryvonozhko, who leads the air force's operations in the cen-

tral part of Ukraine, has temporarily assumed the role of overall commander.

Kyiv also on Friday issued a plea for Mongolia to arrest Putin when he visits the country next week. It is the Russian leader's first trip to a country that is a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) since The Hague-based body issued an arrest warrant for him last year over the alleged deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Mongolia is technically obligated to detain him, though the Kremlin said Friday it was not concerned about that possibility and there is little the ICC can do if it chooses not to. — Agencies

Russian mercenaries pulled out of Burkina Faso to defend Kursk

PARIS: Ukraine's cross-border incursion into Russia has disrupted Russian mercenaries' plans in junta-led Burkina Faso, with many now pulled out to help boost Moscow's defenses back home, a paramilitary commander said on Friday. In an interview with AFP, Viktor Yermolaev, head of a paramilitary unit known as Medvedi (Bears) in Russia and the Bear Brigade in the West, said many of his fighters had left the West African country, while some stayed behind.

Ukraine earlier this month launched the unprecedented incursion into Russia's western Kursk region, adding a new factor in the over two year war that began in February 2022 with Moscow's invasion of its neighbor. The Bear Brigade is one of several such mercenary groups that emerged in recent years alongside the now defunct Wagner Group of

the late Yevgeny Prigozhin and Western analysts say are closely linked to the Russian state. "We thought Ukrainians wanted to end this war and sit down at the negotiating table, but after their entry into the Kursk region we see that they chose the path of war, and war is our job," said Yermolaev, who is also known by his call sign Jedi. "There is no higher honor for a Russian warrior than to defend his homeland. This is the way," added Yermolaev, who said he had served in Russia's airborne troops for 15 years.

He said he was now in Russia but declined to provide further details or say how many fighters had been pulled out. The unit's Telegram channel said earlier this week that "due to recent events" the unit was returning to Crimea, the Ukrainian Black Sea peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014, where it is based.

A Western security source told AFP that around a hundred fighters of the paramilitary unit had left Burkina Faso. Western intelligence believes that the fighters have been tasked in particular with providing security for the country's junta leader Ibrahim Traore who took power in 2022. A succession of coups in francophone western Africa — in Mali in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023 —

have led to a drastic increase in Russia's influence as Russian mercenaries were called in to prop up new regimes. Coup leaders in Burkina Faso expelled troops and diplomats from former colonial ruler France and turned to Russia for military assistance.

'Limited impact'

Yermolaev declined to discuss their operations in Burkina Faso, but said there were around 300 Bear Brigade fighters in the African country before the Kursk incursion. "Some are remaining of course, we have bases and property, equipment and ammunition, we're not taking all that to Russia."

One picture circulating on social media shows Yermolaev, shaven-headed and with a salt-and-pepper beard, smiling and clasping Traore's hand. Yermolaev told AFP the picture was recent, saying he "stopped by to say goodbye" to Traore. In June, an African diplomatic source had told AFP that "two rotations of planes carrying Russian instructors" had arrived in the country from neighboring Mali. The term is generally used to describe Russian mercenaries operating in Africa. Yermolaev claimed his group was independent of the Russian defense ministry. "But we always

help them when they come to us," he added.

Jack Margolin, an independent expert on private military companies, said the group's exit would unlikely impact the battlefield in the African country. "Bears have had limited impact on the ground in Burkina Faso, mainly focused on training and security for political leadership. They haven't taken on the level of risk that Wagner units have in places like Mali," Margolin, who is based in Washington DC, told AFP on Friday. "Bears are just one part of how the Russian military has deployed to Burkina Faso, and it's likely that Russia will maintain a presence through other units — whether more formal, or others like Bears," he added.

Lou Osborn of the All Eyes on Wagner monitor described the unit as a "group of volunteers" whose members had signed a contract with Russia's GRU military intelligence service. Wagner, Russia's most notorious mercenary group, was disbanded and reorganized following the death of its leader Prigozhin in a mysterious plane crash last year following an aborted mutiny. Russian security operations in Africa are now coordinated through an umbrella group known as the Africa Corps. — AFP

Gaza 2.0: Zionists target West Bank...

Continued from Page 1

in the southern city of Khan Yunis. Among them was Amal Shaheen's three-year-old daughter, who was already in the hospital being treated for pneumonia. "We have been in the hospital for 17 days... I spend all my days worrying about her," Shaheen said. "Today she was vaccinated against polio to protect her, like all the children in the hospital have been vaccinated."

Bakr Deeb told AFP on Saturday that he brought his three children — all under 10 — to a vaccination point on Saturday despite some initial doubts about its safety. "I was hesitant at first and very afraid of the safety of this vaccination," he said. "After the assurances of its safety, and with all the families going to the vaccination points, I decided to go with my children as well, to protect them." Moussa Abed, director of primary health care at the health ministry in Gaza, stressed on Saturday that the vaccine was "100 percent safe".

As clashes and explosions persisted in the northern West Bank city of Jenin, the Zionist military said two Palestinians were killed while preparing to carry out separate bombings overnight in the southern West Bank. Palestinian militant group Hamas hailed the twin attacks as a "heroic operation". Hamas ally Islamic Jihad, which has a strong presence in the northern West Bank, said it "congratulates" those involved in what it called a "coordinated attack".

The Zionist army described a vehicle explosion at a petrol station in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc as "an attempted car bombing" by a man who was later killed. An army officer "was moderately injured, and a reservist officer responsible for the security in a nearby community sustained minor injuries", it said in a statement.

In the second incident, the head of security in the Zionist settlement of Karmeit Zur engaged in a car chase with a man who had infiltrated the settlement compound, leading to a collision and the man being "neutralized shortly after", the statement said. "During the confrontation, an explosive device in the man's car detonated, it added.

At least 20 Palestinians have been killed by the Zionist army since Wednesday in simultaneous raids in several cities across the northern West Bank. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have said at least

13 of the dead were members of their armed wings. Since Friday, soldiers have concentrated their operations on the city of Jenin and its refugee camps, long a bastion of Palestinian armed groups fighting against the Zionist entity.

On Saturday morning, an AFP photographer in Jenin heard ongoing clashes in the city, where the streets were mostly empty save for armored vehicles, including one that blocked access to the government hospital. "I think it's the worst day since the start of the raid... We hear from time to time clashes and sometimes there is big bombing," said hospital director Wisam Bakr. Water and electricity were cut off from the hospital during the raid, forcing it to rely on a generator and water tank, he told AFP.

Violence has surged in the West Bank since Hamas' Oct 7 attack. The United Nations said Wednesday that at least 637 Palestinians had been killed in the territory by Zionist troops or settlers since the Gaza war began. Among those killed since Wednesday were an 82-year-old man, said the Palestinian news agency Wafa, and two teenagers, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, which said another 55 had been wounded.

Britain, France and Spain expressed concerns about the Zionist entity's West Bank operation, with Madrid denouncing "an outbreak of violence which is clearly unacceptable". In Gaza, the Zionist entity pushed on with its deadly offensive, killing at least 48 people. Gaza's civil defense agency said rescuers had pulled 29 bodies from the rubble since dawn and transported dozens of wounded to hospitals across the devastated territory. In Nuseirat, one of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, medics said separate Zionist strikes killed at least 19 people, including nine members of the same family.

On Friday, a medical source at the southern Nasser Hospital said a Zionist strike killed three people near the southern city of Khan Yunis. Zionist shelling in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza killed two people on the same day, the civil defense agency said. The fighting has devastated Gaza, repeatedly displaced most of its 2.4 million people and triggered a humanitarian crisis.

The Zionist military campaign has killed at least 40,691 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. The war has drawn in Iran-backed groups from around the region and raised fears of a wider conflict. On Saturday, Lebanese group Hezbollah said it had launched "explosives-laden drones" at the Zionist entity's Beit Hillel barracks "in response" to Zionist attacks. — Agencies

66,000 Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine: Media

WARSAW: Independent Russian media outlet Mediazona said Saturday according to its estimates more than 66,000 Russian military personnel have died during the war in Ukraine. Mediazona has been drawing up a list of known soldier deaths in conjunction with the BBC Russian Service using open-source data. Previously in April, they announced they had found more than 50,000 names of Russians killed. Mediazona said Saturday that "as of August 30, we know the names of 66,471 Russian soldiers killed in the war". The list has gone up by more than 4,600 in the last four weeks, it said, while stressing this was not a definitive figure since many soldiers' deaths are not made public.

Brazil blocks X after judge's...

Continued from Page 1

The two have been locked in an ongoing, high-profile feud for months as Moraes leads a battle against disinformation in Brazil.

Musk has previously declared himself a "free speech absolutist", but since he took over the platform in 2022, he has been accused of turning it into a megaphone for rightwing conspiracy theories. He is a vocal supporter of former US president Donald Trump's bid to regain the White House. Moraes ordered the "immediate, complete and comprehensive suspension of the operation of" X in the country, telling the national communications agency to take "all necessary measures" to implement the order within 24 hours.

He threatened a fine of 50,000 reais (\$8,900) to anyone who used "technological subterfuges" to get around the block, such as a VPN. The judge also demanded Google, Apple and Internet providers "introduce technological obstacles capable of preventing the use of the X application" and access to the website — though he later walked back that order. The social media platform has more than 22 million users in Brazil.

Musk shut X's business operations in Brazil earlier this month, claiming Moraes had threatened the company's previous legal representative with arrest to force compliance with "censorship orders". On Wednesday, Moraes told Musk he had 24 hours to find a new representative

Anastasia Alekseyeva, a journalist at Mediazona, stressed that the latest death numbers were "not linked to Ukraine's offensive in the Kursk region or Russia's advance in the east". This is because researchers are still working through a backlog of death reports, she said. The report found that 172 conscripts doing national service have been killed in the war, with the highest figures in early months. However these figures may be inexact since conscripts can sign professional army contracts and some may have done so without telling relatives, Mediazona editor Dmitry Treshch-anin said. According to Mediazona's breakdown, the region with the largest absolute number of deaths — 2,578 — is the southern republic of Bashkortostan, which has a large Muslim population. The most represented age group overall was 33-35 (6,877 deaths). More than 12,000 of the dead were prisoners, after Russia sought to recruit inmates by promising them freedom after a period on the front line. But numbers have dropped recently, Alekseyeva said: "evidently the recruitment drive is not as active". — AFP

or he would face suspension. Shortly after the deadline passed, X said in a statement that it expected Moraes to shut it down "simply because we would not comply with his illegal orders to censor his political opponents".

The standoff with Musk began when Moraes ordered the suspension of several X accounts belonging to supporters of Brazil's former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who tried to discredit the voting system in the 2022 election, which he lost. Brazilian authorities are investigating whether Bolsonaro plotted a coup attempt to prevent current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from assuming office in Jan 2023.

Online users blocked by Moraes include figures such as far-right ex-congressman Daniel Silveira, who was sentenced to nine years in prison in 2022 on charges of leading a movement to overthrow the Supreme Court. In April, Moraes ordered an investigation of Musk, accusing him of reactivating some of the banned accounts. On Thursday, Musk's satellite Internet operator Starlink said it had received an order from Moraes that froze its accounts and prevented it from conducting financial transactions in Brazil.

Starlink alleged that the order "is based on an unfounded determination that Starlink should be responsible for the fines levied — unconstitutionally — against X". The company said on X that it intended "to address the matter legally". Musk is also the subject of a separate judicial investigation into an alleged scheme where public money was used to orchestrate disinformation campaigns in favor of Bolsonaro and those close to him. "Any citizen from anywhere in the world who has investments in Brazil is subject to the Brazilian Constitution and laws," Lula told a local radio station on Friday. "Who does (Musk) think he is?" — AFP

International

Trump moves to contain fallout of abortion, IVF rows

Conservatives slam Republican nominee's ever-shifting positions on reproductive rights

JOHNSTOWN, United States: Republican White House nominee Donald Trump sought Friday to contain the blast radius of a fierce backlash over his remarks publicly backing away from right-wing positions on reproductive rights. The ex-president has been under fire from conservatives over an announcement that in a second term he would ensure free in vitro fertilization (IVF) — an expensive fertility procedure that many in the anti-abortion movement want to see curbed.

The rift widened as he hit out at his home state Florida's six-week abortion ban, calling it too restrictive and suggesting he planned to vote for an upcoming ballot measure that would make the procedure legal until a fetus becomes viable. Trump, 78, walked back the comment ahead of a rally in the battleground state of Pennsylvania on Friday, telling Fox News that "I will be voting no."

But conservatives had already begun criticizing Trump's ever-shifting positions on abortion, with a new Republican policy platform dropping calls for a national ban and the tycoon's recent claim that his government would be "great" for reproductive rights. The pushback from anti-abortion groups on his latest remarks was swift, with activists warning that he risks alienating his base.

Evangelical theologian Albert Mohler said Trump's positions appeared "almost calculated to alienate pro-life voters" while conservative commentator Erick Erickson posted that Trump's abortion stance "will be a bridge too far for too many." Trump's rally, in Johnstown, was notable for the absence of any remarks on reproductive rights, despite Thursday's big IVF announcement. The campaign of Democratic candidate Kamala Harris was happy to weigh in on the issue, smelling blood in the water.

"The majority of Americans support abortion

access, they support IVF, they support contraception," Mini Timmaraju, of the Reproductive Freedom for All lobby group, told reporters in a campaign call. "(Trump) has finally figured it out, and he'll do anything to distract from his abysmal, horrifying record on this issue."

'He is pro-life'

Trump has been all over the map on abortion in the last 15 years, initially describing himself as "pro-choice" before calling for "some form of punishment" for women seeking the procedure. He boasts about appointing Supreme Court justices who ended federal protections for abortion access in 2022 but has more recently begun to worry that Republicans are out of step with the majority of voters on reproductive rights.

His IVF pledge appeared calculated to appeal to moderates but will upset conservatives who for years opposed Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act because they were against the redistributive economics of taxpayer-funded health insurance. Almost every Senate Republican voted against assuring IVF access in a vote in June — including Trump's running mate J.D. Vance — and more than half of the House Republican lawmakers have sponsored legislation that threatens its legality.

Republicans are divided on fertility treatments such as IVF, with many hailing them as a boost to American families. Others, with strong beliefs that life begins at conception, oppose IVF because the procedure can produce multiple embryos, not all of which get used.

Abortion rights activists worry that the Supreme Court decision threatens IVF and were given cause by a February ruling in Alabama that frozen embryos could be considered people, causing several



JOHNSTOWN, United States: Former US President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump dances to a song as he leaves a rally at 1st Summit Arena in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on August 30, 2024. — AFP

clinics to briefly pause treatments. Yet if the abortion and IVF rows threatened to alienate Trump's most loyal supporters, rally-goers in Johnstown weren't showing it.

"It's not enough to make me not vote for him, no way, because he is pro-life," said Lisa Davis, a 54-year-old retired office manager from the nearby

town of Somerset. "I know he wants to give some exceptions — and I think there should be."

"Why should I pay with my tax dollars for a baby getting killed?" added retired nurse Rosemary Drzal, 69. A fireside chat-style appearance at the conservative pressure group Moms for Liberty later Friday did not touch on the issue. — AFP



TIGER: The Thompson family poses for a portrait at their home on June 8, 2024, in Tiger, Georgia. — AFP photos



CLAYTON: Parishioners read their Bibles during Sunday service at Clayton Baptist Church, June 9, 2024, in Clayton, Georgia.

In rural Georgia, evangelicals all in for Trump

CLAYTON, United States: Churches dot the green hills of Rabun County, Georgia, where American flags flutter and God is everything — but Donald Trump is not far behind. In the southern battleground state, the faithful are well aware that the Republican former president is hardly a model Christian.

But they are quick to forgive him because he appointed three conservative-leaning justices to the Supreme Court that voted in 2022 to overturn Roe v. Wade, eliminating a woman's constitutional right to an abortion. Yance Thompson, a strapping 40-year-old with piercing blue eyes, lives on one of those sun-dappled green hills of the Appalachian Mountains. A Bible rests on the table of the patio of his spacious house.

He and his wife Meredith — who have 10 children, nine of them adopted — speak with one voice on faith and politics. "I believe that abortion is wrong. I would say he did a great job on that," Yance Thompson says of Trump. "I do not like abortion at all. I feel like it's not OK. I feel like a child is a child as soon as conception happens," adds Meredith, 38. "I do not agree with abortion at all. It breaks my heart. It makes me very sad."

Nearly half of Rabun County's residents identify as evangelical Christians, and more than 70 percent

call themselves religious. As a kid whose father was a preacher, Yance says with a smile, "I was always in church. I grew up in church." "You get this real sense of community," he said of Rabun. "You see families that have stayed in those churches, and just been faithful, for hundreds of years." "We kind of live in a little bubble around here," says Meredith. Both say they will vote Republican in November.

Bible Belt

Of course, Yance is not blind to some of Trump's failings. He says the real estate mogul is "not a bad" politician — while admitting he might not be as good a Christian. In 2023, Trump was found liable for sexual assault; this past May, he was convicted of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush money payments to a porn star on the eve of the 2016 election. He has owned casinos and been married three times.

Trump, who was targeted in an assassination attempt in July, has nevertheless played the divine intervention card on the campaign trail, saying God saved his life. That stump speech line is certain to play well among the most pious voters, including those in Rabun County in the heart of America's Bible Belt, which runs from southeastern states like Georgia all the way out to Texas.

Some residents fly Confederate flags from their pickup trucks, often alongside a Trump 2024 sign. Trump won Georgia in 2016 and evangelical Christians were key to that victory. In Rabun, eight of every 10 people voted for him in 2020, when he lost narrowly to Joe Biden. Meredith Thompson, who

runs a furniture store, went to Christian school and a Christian university. She says she prays whenever she can. Her opposition to abortion has led her to vote Republican consistently, she says. "It seems like a lot of the, you know, Democratic nature is very controversial, is very angry. You know, protesting, burning down buildings. I don't like violence," she says. "I lean obviously Republican. I want our freedoms to remain intact."

'On pins and needles'

In the town of Clayton, the Rabun County seat tucked away in the woods, Sunday is for prayer. The Baptist church in the center of town is packed — more than 400 people occupy chairs in a gym that has been turned into a place of worship, with a large screen overhead and plenty of music.

The Thompson family sits in the front row as Yance delivers a sermon. Everyone remembers what happened four years ago when Biden narrowly defeated Trump to claim Georgia — a state divided between primarily Democratic urban areas like Atlanta and conservative rural zones — by less than 12,000 votes. Trump was indicted in the state last year for trying to overturn the result.

Will Griffin, the young pastor of the Baptist church in Clayton, says people are still angry about that loss. "They feel like their rug was jerked out from under them in the last election," Griffin says. "And so everybody is on pins and needles," wondering what will happen this time, he said. "They're going to vote for their candidate. And they're going to hope and really pray that the process is faithful." — AFP



AT SEA: This frame grab from handout video footage by the Philippine Coast Guard shows a Chinese coast guard ship (left) colliding with a Philippine coast guard ship in disputed waters of the South China Sea. — AFP

Washington was distracted by the ongoing Middle East conflict and the uncertainties around its own presidential election in November.

However the Philippines on Thursday flagged the possibility of US escorts for its resupply missions. Chong Ja Ian, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore (NUS), told AFP China was trying to "wear down" Filipino resolve. Beijing is posing a "direct challenge to the Philippines' ability to administer and make use of its exclusive economic zone", he said. They are "trying to push the envelope (but stay) below the threshold of aggression", he explained. — AFP

China pushes rivals' limits in regional disputes

BEIJING: China's campaign of confrontation, from remote reefs in Southeast Asia to Taiwan and far-flung Japanese islands, is designed to wear down regional rivals competing with it for contested territories, analysts say. Beijing in recent years has asserted its claims in the long-running disputes far more boldly as its military strength has grown.

The escalating actions — over islands in the East China Sea claimed by Japan, the self-ruled territory of Taiwan and the South China Sea — have also come as Beijing's rivals have drawn closer to the United States. "(China) believes its strong-arm tactics are paying dividends," Duan Dang, a Vietnam-based maritime security analyst, told AFP.

China has in recent months deployed military and coast guard vessels in a bid to eject the Philippines from a trio of strategically important reefs and islands in the South China Sea. "The number of fronts where an accident could spiral suddenly is very real," Dylan Loh, an assistant professor at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, told AFP.

The latest flashpoint is Sabina Shoal, just 140 kilometers (86 miles) west of the Philippine island of Palawan and roughly 1,200 kilometers from China's nearest major landmass, the island of Hainan. On Monday, Beijing said it took "control measures" against two Philippine Coast Guard ships that "illegally" entered the waters near Sabina Shoal. Manila countered that Chinese vessels had stopped Philippine ships from resupplying their own coast guard vessels in the area — slamming Beijing as the "biggest disruptor" to regional peace.

'Push the envelope'

China has for years sought to expand its power in the South China Sea, brushing aside an international ruling that its claim to most of the waterway has no legal basis. It has built artificial islands armed with missile systems and runways for fighter jets, and deployed vessels that the Philippines says harass its ships and block its fishers. In 2012, Beijing seized control of Scarborough Shoal, another contested area close to the Philippines. And in June, Chinese coast guard personnel brandishing weapons boarded Philippine vessels near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal, a confrontation in which Manila said one of its sailors lost a thumb.

The recent incidents have come as the Philippines has strengthened ties with traditional ally the United States, with which it has a mutual defense treaty. Duan said the pact might "deter outright war", but Beijing still saw a chance to tighten the screws on Manila while

With Hasina gone in Bangladesh, a rival tastes power

DHAKA: Two women dominated Bangladeshi politics for decades. One was chased into exile. The other is newly free from custody and too sick to rule, but her heir looks set to take power. Autocratic ex-premier Sheikh Hasina, 76, fled the country by helicopter for neighboring India this month as huge crowds demanding an end to her rule marched towards her palace.

Hours after the student-led uprising sparked the sudden collapse of her government, her lifelong rival and two-time prime minister Khaleda Zia, 79, was released from house arrest for the first time in years. Members of Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) endured crackdowns and mass arrests under Hasina, who pointed to her opposition's cozy relations with Islamists as justification.

A caretaker government has run the country since Hasina's ouster — but it has to hold new elections eventually, and now that the BNP has emerged from the underground, its members are confident of their prospects. "People who supported us from behind for a very long time, they are now coming to the front," Mollik Wasi Tami, a leader of the party's student wing, told AFP.

Interim leader and Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, 84, has said he has no plans to continue in politics after his current role is finished. The students who led Hasina's overthrow have no fondness for Zia either, and it remains unclear whether they would support a future BNP government or seek to form their own party.

But whatever they decide, analysts say that when polls are held, the BNP is the force with the cross-country network, the political experience and the drive to win. "In the next election, whenever it takes place, the BNP has more appeal," Bangladeshi politics expert and Illinois State University professor Ali Riaz told AFP. Zia herself is too ill to assume the prime ministership a third time. She has suffered from numerous chronic health complaints since she was jailed in 2018 after a graft conviction widely seen as politically motivated, whatever the charge's true merits.

Zia has only appeared in public once since her release, in a pre-recorded video statement to a BNP rally in Dhaka from a hospital bed, during which she appeared sick and frail. "We need love and peace to rebuild our country," she told thousands of party faithful at the rally, held two days after Hasina left Bangladesh. Her supporters are planning to take her abroad for urgent medical care, clearing the way for her eldest son and heir apparent Tarique Rahman to take the reins.

'He will come back'

Tarique has led the BNP since his mother's conviction while in exile in London, where he fled to avoid his own set of graft charges — which his party is now working to quash. "When the legal problems are solved, he will come back," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, the BNP's secretary-general, told AFP.

Tarique's visage already appears alongside that of his mother on the party's banners and campaign materials, including at the rally held two days after Hasina's toppling. The fact that rally happened at all was a remarkable departure from Hasina's rule. The BNP's senior leaders and thousands of activists were jailed late last year ahead of January elections that — absent any genuine political opposition — returned Hasina to power. — AFP

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

OpenAI and Meta flex muscles as competition in AI sector heats up

World's biggest AI companies poised to release new usage data



SUN VALLEY, US: Anderson Cooper walks with Sam Altman, chief executive officer of OpenAI, after attending the morning session during the Allen & Company Sun Valley Conference in Sun Valley, Idaho. — AFP

SAN FRANCISCO: The world's biggest AI companies are releasing new usage data showing significant growth as competition in the generative artificial intelligence sector heats up. The pressure to show that ChatGPT-style AI chatbots are being adopted by the wider public is significant given the huge costs of delivering the technology. The numbers could help quiet the small but growing group of naysayers that are asking to see bigger and quicker revenue from AI chatbots and other tools.

OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, on Thursday told US media that usage of its iconic chatbot had more than doubled since November to 200 million active monthly users. The company led by CEO Sam Altman and heavily backed by Microsoft also said that 92 percent of Fortune 500 companies were using its services. Facebook-owner Meta meanwhile on Friday said that usage of AI features across its platforms had jumped to 400 million monthly users

and 185 million on a weekly basis. The use of AI by Meta's more than three billion users was "growing quickly, and we haven't even rolled out in UK, Brazil, or EU yet," CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg said in post on Threads.

The company also said that use of its company-built Llama model on the major cloud service providers had doubled between May and July with the release of its latest update. Most companies using AI models access them through the world's leading cloud providers — Amazon, Microsoft, IBM and Google — instead of installing them on their own servers. Llama, which is available for free, competes directly with the models that power ChatGPT or Google's Gemini that are also made available to companies for a fee through the cloud providers.

Microsoft, which builds its AI tools from OpenAI's technology, said in its latest earnings call that usage of its Copilot chatbot by business customers

had increased 60 percent in just three months. It added that overall web users have used Copilot to create over 12 billion images and conduct 13 billion chats to date and numbers were up 150 percent since the start of the calendar year. Google, despite having led the way to develop much of generative AI's capabilities over the years, has been criticized for lagging its rivals in deploying AI and making gaffes when it did.

The search engine giant last month said its Gemini chatbot was now included across all its products (such as Gmail or Google Maps) and on Thursday said it was again making its AI image generator available to Gemini's premium and business customers. Google earlier this year suspended generating images of people after Gemini was discovered to be creating diverse but historically inaccurate images, such as Asian Nazis during World War II or a George Washington who was Black. — AFP

India outperforms major economies, but growth slows

NEW DELHI: India's economic growth slowed to 6.7 percent year-on-year in the April-June quarter as a decline in government spending during national elections weighed, data showed on Friday, but it remained the world's fastest-growing major economy. The rise in gross domestic product was less than a 6.9 percent expansion forecast by a Reuters poll, and compared to 7.8 percent growth in the previous quarter.

Still, it was faster than 4.7 percent growth in China, Asia's biggest economy, in April-June, and India's slowdown is expected to be temporary as economists forecast that easing inflation and a pickup in government spending will shore up growth in the coming months. V Anantha Nageswaran, India's chief economic adviser, said growth momentum remained strong backed up strong investment demand and up-

beat business sentiments. "In the medium term, the Indian economy can grow at a rate of 7 percent plus on a sustainable basis if we can build on the structural reforms undertaken over the last decade," he told reporters after the release of data.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken several steps to boost the economy since recent national elections, in which his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to win an outright majority and is having to rely on allies to run the government for the first time in a decade. The Gross Value Added (GVA), seen by economists as a more stable measure of growth, increased by 6.8 percent in April-June from a year earlier, compared to 6.3 percent in the previous quarter.

Utasna Bhardwaj, chief economist at Mumbai-based Kotak Mahindra Bank, said the GDP numbers were softer than expectations but the GVA remained firm with non-farm growth holding up. "We retain our GDP growth expectations of 6.9 percent in 2024/25, aided largely by rural demand and government spending while watching closely the likely fatigue in urban demand, private capex and pace of global slowdown," she said. Consumer spending, which constitutes about 60 percent of GDP, rose to a seven-quarter high of 7.4 percent in



AMRITSAR: Laborers work at a construction site in Amritsar on Aug 28, 2024. — AFP

April-June from a year earlier, compared to 4 percent in the previous quarter. Capital investments also rose by 7.4 percent compared to 6.5 percent in the previous quarter. However, government spending in real terms fell 0.2 percent year-on-year in April-June, compared to a 0.9 percent rise in the previous quarter, data showed. — Reuters

Bangladesh garment industry struggles amid floods, protests

DHAKA: Garment factories in Bangladesh, one of the world's biggest clothing production hubs, are struggling to complete orders on time as flooding disrupts their cotton supplies — exacerbating a backlog caused by recent political turmoil. Bangladesh is a leading global cotton importer due to the size of its textile and garment industry, but the devastating floods mean few trucks and trains have been able to bring supplies to factories from Chittagong port over the last week, industry officials and analysts said.

The disruption, on top of the unrest and protests that led to factory closures earlier this month, have caused garment production to fall by 50 percent, said Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association. "The industry is now under immense pressure to meet deadlines, and without a swift resolution, the supply chain could deteriorate even further," Hatem said.

Bangladesh was ranked as the third-largest exporter of clothing in the world last year, after Chi-

na and the European Union, according to the World Trade Organization, exporting \$38.4 billion worth of clothes in 2023. At the clothing factory she runs in the capital, Dhaka, Rubana Huq is counting the cost of lost production. "Even for a moderate-sized company like ours, which makes 50,000 shirts a day and if the price of one single shirt is \$5, there was \$250,000 of production loss," said Huq, a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

She said some garment plants were slowing resuming production, but estimated that complete recovery "would be at least six months away", warning that Bangladesh's ready-made garments industry, which supplies many of the world's best-known fashion brands, accounts for more than 80 percent of the country's total export earnings. Buyers are adopting a cautious approach and could potentially delay new orders, said Shahidullah Azim, a director of the BGMEA industry group. "The longer this uncertainty persists, the more challenging it becomes for us to maintain the momentum we have built," he told Reuters. The Bangladesh Meteorological Department said flood conditions could persist if the monsoon rains continued, as water levels were receding very slowly. — Reuters

Libya central bank head flees country over 'threats'

TUNIS: Libya's central bank governor Seddik Al-Kabir said he fled the country following "threats" from armed groups, amid tensions between rival administrations over the bank's management, the Financial Times reported Friday.

"The head of the Libyan central bank who controls billions of dollars in oil revenue said he and other senior bank staff had been forced to flee the country to 'protect our lives' from potential attacks by armed militia," the British newspaper reported. In a phone interview with the newspaper Kabir, whose location was not specified, said militias have been "threatening and terrifying bank staff" in attempts to push him out of office.

Tensions have been rising since early August when a group of men — some of whom were armed — laid siege to the bank demanding the removal of Kabir. On August 18, the bank announced it was suspending all operations following the abduction of its information technology chief. He was eventually released.

CBK launches Kuwait overnight interest average index

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Thursday announced the launch of the Kuwait Overnight Interest Average (KONIA) as of next Sunday as part of its efforts to consolidate financial stability. The move is meant to introduce financial benchmarks for the local market seen as a reliable reference as per the best international standards and to contribute to enhancing transparency and efficiency of financial transactions in Kuwait, it said in a press statement.

The (KONIA) Index is based on the volume-weighted average of actual interest rates used by local banks in their KD interbank overnight transactions and is considered an effective tool for assessing financing costs and liquidity positions in the local banking sector, thus fairly expressing the supply and demand position for inter-financial institution funds, it added.

The CBK underlined that it would launch the (KONIA) Index on a daily basis starting September 1, 2024, on its official website, as well as on its pages on "Bloomberg and Refinitiv." In addition, data on KD overnight interbank transactions will also be published, along with "Kuwait Interbank Offer Rate" (KIBOR). It highlighted its keenness to continue its approach to constant development, taking all necessary measures to enhance transparency and efficiency of the financial transactions and reinforce the financial and monetary stability in the country. — KUNA

Days later an eastern-based administration in divided Libya said that an "outlaw group" close to UN-recognized government based in Tripoli had forcibly taken over the central bank. As a result the administration based in the eastern city of Benghazi said it was suspending operations across oil fields and terminals in areas under its jurisdiction. The locations affected constitute around 90 percent of the country's oil fields and terminals.

The oil blockade has led daily production volumes to dwindle to around 600,000 barrels per day, almost by half. Libya's Thursday by the National Oil Company said on Thursday. Kabir has faced criticism from people close to Dbeibah over the central bank's management of oil resources and the state budget. Libya is struggling to recover from years of conflict after the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that overthrew Muammar Gaddafi. It remains divided between the UN-recognized government in the capital Tripoli led by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, and the rival administration in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. Kabir told the Financial Times that a commission set up by the authorities in Tripoli had seized control over the bank, and he blamed Dbeibah for this "illegal" action. On Thursday, the bank, now under Tripoli-appointed interim governor Abdel Fattah Ghaffar, said its "main network has returned to work normally." — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank celebrates Int'l Women's Equality Day with Melody Mitchell

WOW program showcases commitment to empowering women, advancing gender equality

KUWAIT: In celebration of International Women's Equality Day on Aug 26, Gulf Bank's Women of Wisdom (WOW) program welcomed Melody Mitchell, the renowned American speaker and trainer and founder of the Lean In Network in Kuwait, as a guest during its monthly meeting.

Salma Al-Hajjaj

Gender equality fosters a healthy work environment, which directly impacts productivity and enhances customer service

In 2017, Gulf Bank introduced the Women Of Wisdom (WOW) program as an internal initiative designed to support women both within the bank and in the community. The program focuses on helping women advance their careers and reach leadership roles, providing networking opportunities through monthly gatherings that cover various work-life balance topics. Inspired by Sheryl Sandberg's book, the Lean In gatherings aim to establish small support groups where women can regularly meet to share experiences, learn together, and support each other's personal and professional growth. These gatherings foster a nurturing environment for skill development and professional networking.

Addressing a large audience of Gulf Bank employees, Melody Mitchell spoke about empowering women, emphasizing that equality begins with empowering women and highlighting the crucial role private sector institutions play in this regard.

Salma Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, emphasized that Gulf Bank is dedicated to empowering women both within the bank and in the community.

This commitment encompasses everything from recruitment and training, to advanced development opportunities, with the goal of supporting women in reaching leadership roles. She highlighted the bank's ef-



A group photo taken during Gulf Bank's Women of Wisdom (WOW) program.

orts in creating a fair and equitable work environment, noting that Gulf Bank was one of the first signatories to the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles in Kuwait. Additionally, it was the first Kuwaiti bank to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination among its employees, ensuring equal benefits and opportunities in alignment with UN principles, the bank's 2025 strategy, and Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Hajjaj emphasized that gender equality fosters a healthy work environment, which directly impacts productivity and enhances customer service. She pointed out that studies have shown companies that adhere to gender equality principles experience higher profits and productivity.

She added, "We believe that promoting a culture of

diversity and inclusion not only enhances the bank's positive image, but also improves performance, supports development, fosters innovation, and strengthens employee connections. Empowering women, youth, and individuals with special needs is crucial for societal advancement." Al-Hajjaj also highlighted the need for continuous efforts to close the gender gap, which enhances institutional productivity, supports the national economy, and boosts GDP. She concluded, "We are committed to women's empowerment as a key driver of economic development and sustainability, in line with the bank's strategy and Kuwait's vision."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and

empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.

French central bank chief urges ECB rate cut

PARIS: France's central bank chief has called for the European Central Bank to cut interest rates at its next meeting in September as eurozone inflation gradually eases. Reducing borrowing costs at the meeting would be "fair and wise", Bank of France governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau said in an interview with Le Point magazine published Friday.

"We are not yet at our two percent inflation target on a permanent basis, but we will very probably be there in the first half of next year for France and in the second half for the eurozone," he said.

Data this week showed that inflation in France and Germany, the eurozone's biggest economies, had fallen below two percent this month. And official data released Friday showed consumer price rises in the 20 countries that use the euro eased to 2.2 percent in August, their lowest level in more than three years and not far off the ECB's two-percent target.

"If we waited until we were actually at two percent to lower rates, we would be acting too late," said the French central bank chief, noting that it takes some time for monetary policy changes to feed through to the economy. The Frankfurt-based ECB launched a historic campaign of interest rate hikes in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy and food costs soaring. Inflation peaked at 10.6 percent in October that year.

With inflation easing, the ECB cut rates for the first time after the hiking cycle in June. It kept borrowing costs on hold in July but expectations have been growing for a further cut at its meeting on Sept 12. Earlier Friday, ECB board member Isabel Schnabel said, how-



VILLEFRANCHE-SUR-SAONE, France: A customer buys vegetables in a Casino Hyperfrais hypermarket, in Villefranche-sur-Saone, central France. — AFP

ever, that rate setters should proceed "gradually and cautiously" in loosening monetary policy as there were still challenges in tackling inflation. In a speech in Estonia before the latest eurozone inflation figures were released, she cautioned that headline inflation "understates the challenges monetary policy is still facing".

She pointed in particular to stubborn inflation in the services sector. The central bank currently expects inflation to fall back to its two-percent target at the

end of 2025, she said. The French economy grew at a slower pace than previously thought in the second quarter, official data showed Friday, while inflation cooled to a three-year low in August. Gross domestic product expanded by 0.2 percent in the April-to-June period compared to the first quarter, according to the INSEE statistics agency. In its July estimate, the agency reported growth of 0.3 percent, similar to the first quarter performance. — AFP



A vegetable vendor arranges tomatoes on his handcart along a roadside in New Delhi. — AFP

investment firm Emkay Global. BJP-ruled Haryana has waived water dues for thousands of farmers, cut prices of cooking gas for millions of poor families and announced allowances for unemployed youth.

Inflation, unemployment and rural distress emerged as key issues in the general election and surveys show these remain uppermost ahead of the state elections. "Although doles are not a new phenomenon, it is the prevalence of populist promises in this cycle across the political spectrum that is worrying," said Madhavi Aroa, an economist at Emkay. "The recent wave of populist spending across poll-bound states could upset the fine fiscal balancing act that had been playing out so far."

Opposition promises include free power to homes and monthly allowances to women. Modi in the past has

decried the practice. "This culture of freebies is very dangerous for the development of the country," he said in 2022. "The people following this culture will never build new expressways, airports or defense corridors for you. They feel that they can buy the people by distributing freebies to them. Together we have to defeat this approach and remove the freebies culture from the politics of the country."

Yashwant Deshmukh, founder of polling agency CVoter, said politicians will increasingly resort to freebies amid widening economic disparity, especially in the absence of emotive issues like tensions with India's arch enemy Pakistan which helped the BJP in the 2019 national elections. "The fiscal consequence of this culture is devastating, but there is a big yearning among the masses for such social welfarism," he said.

Modi has taken several other populist decisions which take effect across the country. He recently reversed a decision to reduce some tax benefits while selling real estate after a middle-class backlash, and also rolled out a pension plan for federal government employees that will cost the exchequer about 62.5 billion rupees (\$745 million) this fiscal year. The government raised its share of the contribution to 18.5 percent of a person's basic salary from 14 percent earlier.

Recently announced budgets of five states, including Maharashtra and other BJP-ruled states like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan, have pegged their average fiscal deficit at 3.2 percent of state GDP, 20 basis points higher than their interim budgets earlier this year mainly because of a rise in their revenue spending on populist measures, according to Elara Securities. — Reuters

News In Brief

Russia raises growth forecast

MOSCOW: The Russian economy will grow by 3.9 percent in 2024, higher than previously expected and higher than last year, thanks to increased state spending, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov told state television on Friday. The estimate is part of a new forecast for 2024 that is due to be released shortly, following the publication of strong economic data showing that the Russian economy was in good shape in the first half of the year. This year's economic growth was previously estimated by the government at 2.8 percent. Last year, the Russian economy grew by 3.6 percent. — Reuters

Denmark lifts 2025 GDP outlook

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's government on Friday proposed raising public spending on welfare and defence in 2025 after forecasting robust economic growth and low inflation this year and next, despite recommendations to tighten its budgets. The Nordic country of 6 million people has benefited from the rapid expansion in recent years of Europe's largest economies are experiencing slow growth or stagnation. Its government on Friday forecast the economy to grow by 2.2 percent next year, up from its previous forecast in May of 1.8 percent growth and above the forecast for the European Union as a whole. — Reuters

German unemployment rises

BERLIN: The number of people out of work in Germany rose significantly less than expected in August, Federal Labor Office figures showed on Friday. The office said the number of unemployed grew by 2,000 in seasonally adjusted terms to 2.8 million. Analysts polled by Reuters had expected that figure to rise by 16,000. The seasonally adjusted job rate remained stable at 6.0 percent. There were 699,000 job openings registered with the labor office in August, 72,000 fewer than a year ago, pointing to a slowdown in labor demand. When looking at the unadjusted number, the number of unemployed grew by 63,000 to 2.9 million, its highest level in three-and-a-half years. — Reuters

Power cut hits large parts of Kenya

NAIROBI: A power cut plunged large parts of Kenya including the capital Nairobi into darkness on Friday, the East African economic powerhouse's main electricity supplier said. All regions served by the national network lost power apart from North Rift and parts of the Western Region, Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) said in a statement. "We regret any inconvenience caused and urge for patience from our customers as we work towards restoring normalcy at the earliest opportunity," it added. Frustrated Kenyans were swift to vent their anger on social media after the power cut hit at around 9.30 pm (1830 GMT). — AFP

Modi's populism reversal puts finances at risk

NEW DELHI: After reverses in the general election and facing possible losses in state polls this year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's coalition has stepped up cash handouts, debt waivers and other freebies, although he has previously criticized the policy. The handouts by state governments and promises by opposition parties trying to match the largesse threaten to upset the fiscal balance in the world's most populous nation and disrupt spending on urban infrastructure and other development projects, analysts say.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost its parliamentary majority in the April-June national election and has stayed in power with the help of fickle allies. Opinion polls predict it could lose provincial elections due in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jammu and Kashmir later this year, while winning in Jharkhand state, which could further dent Modi's popularity.

Maharashtra, India's richest state and ruled by a BJP coalition, has raised its fiscal deficit target to 2.6 percent of state GDP for the current fiscal year from 2.3 percent in an interim budget in February. The latest budget has listed cash handouts for women and free electricity for some farmers that could cost it about 960 billion rupees (\$11.45 billion) in total this fiscal year, or 2.2 percent of state GDP, according to research and

Business

Solid US consumer spending pushes against hopes for hefty Fed rate cut

Core PCE inflation gains 0.2%; personal income climbs 0.3%

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending increased solidly in July, suggesting the economy remained on firmer ground early in the third quarter and arguing against a half-percentage-point interest rate cut from the Federal Reserve next month. The report from the Commerce Department on Friday also showed prices rising moderately last month, curbing inflation. A jump in the unemployment rate to a near three-year high of 4.3 percent in July stoked fears of a recession, leading financial markets and some economists to put a 50-basis-points rate reduction on the table when the US central bank embarks on a widely anticipated policy easing in September.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell last week signaled that a rate cut was imminent, in a nod to the worries over the labor market. "There is nothing here to push the Fed to a half-point cut," said Conrad DeQuadros, senior economic advisor at Brea Capital. "This is not the kind of spending growth associated with recession."

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, rose 0.5 percent last month after advancing by an unrevised 0.3 percent in June, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis reported. The increase was in line with economists' expectations. After adjusting for inflation, consumer spending gained 0.4 percent after rising 0.3 percent in June, and implied that spending retained the momentum from the second quarter, when it helped to boost gross domestic product growth to a 3.0 percent annualized rate.

The economy grew at a 1.4 percent pace in the January-March quarter. The Atlanta Fed raised its third-quarter GDP growth estimate to a 2.5 percent rate from a 2.0 percent pace. The increase in spending was across both goods and services, with outlays on motor vehicles and parts leading the charge. Consumers also spent more on housing and utilities, food and beverages, recreation services as well as financial services and insurance. They also boosted spending on healthcare, visited restaurants and bars and stayed at hotels.

Consumers also bought more recreational goods and vehicles as well as furnishings and long-lasting household equipment. While the labor market momentum has slowed, it continues to generate decent wage growth that is helping to underpin spending. The slowdown in the labor market is mostly driven by a step down in hiring rather than layoffs. Personal income rose 0.3 percent last month after gaining 0.2 percent in June. Wages climbed 0.3 percent after increasing 0.2 percent in June.

The saving rate dropped to 2.9 percent, the lowest level since June 2022, from 3.1 percent in June. Economists were, however, not in agreement on the implications of the decline with some arguing that the government was not fully capturing income earned by undocumented immigrants. Others argued that households were drawing down on savings to maintain spending, which could imperil future consumption. Yet another group was unperturbed by the decline in the saving rate, pointing to strong household balance sheets against the backdrop of higher house and stock prices.

Undocumented immigrants have also been cited as one of the factors behind the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate last week that employment gains were overstated by 68,000 jobs per month in the 12 months through March. The so-called benchmark revision estimate is based on a data set derived from reports by employers to the state unemployment insurance programs. The data does not include undocumented immigrants, a group that economists believe contributed to strong job growth last year. "The BEA could be undercounting income earned by recent immigrants, whose economic activity is harder to measure than workers who have been in the US longer," said Bill Adams, chief economist at Comerica Bank.

"That could mean the saving rate is higher than is currently reported, and would be revised higher when more accurate employment and earnings data become available."



NEW YORK: People leave a shopping mall in Manhattan. — AFP

Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher. The dollar rose against a basket of currencies, while U.S. Treasury prices fell. August's employment report scheduled to be released next Friday will likely determine the size of the September rate cut.

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose 0.2 percent last month after an unrevised 0.1 percent gain in June, the report also showed. Goods prices were unchanged after falling for two straight months. Declines in the prices of motor vehicles and other long-lasting manufactured goods were offset by gains in take-out food and other nondurable goods. The cost of services increased 0.2 percent for a third straight month, lifted by rises in housing and utilities, recreation services as well as financial services and insurance. Healthcare prices were unchanged while the cost of transportation services decreased for the fourth consecutive month.

In the 12 months through July, the PCE price index increased 2.5 percent, matching June's gain. The increase in PCE inflation was in line with economists' expectations. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the PCE price index rose 0.2 percent last month, matching the increase in June. In the 12 months through July, core inflation increased 2.6 percent after advancing by the same rate in June. Core inflation increased at a 1.7 percent annualized rate in the three months through July. The Fed tracks the PCE price measures for its 2 percent inflation target, and has maintained its policy rate in the current 5.25 percent-5.50 percent range for more than a year, having raised it by 525 basis points in 2022 and 2023.

"The data suggest inflation is on track to hit the Fed's 2 percent target," said Pooja Sriram, an economist at Barclays. "We maintain our baseline call for three Fed rate cuts this year." — Reuters

Chinese property developer Vanke posts \$1.4bn loss



ZHENGZHOU, China: A damaged logo of China real estate developer Vanke at a residential housing complex in Zhengzhou, in China's central Henan province. — AFP

BEIJING: Chinese housing developer Vanke announced significant first-half losses on Friday, as local real estate firms contend with an industry-wide crisis compounded by declining home sales in a sluggish economy. Vanke was the second-largest developer in China last year in terms of sales, according to specialist firm CRIC.

The company reported net losses of 9.9 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) in the first half of the year ending June 30, according to a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange on Friday. The amount was higher than estimates made by the group last month, which predicted a net loss of between 7 and 9 billion yuan.

"It will take time for the recovery of residents' confidence in purchasing houses," the company said in the filing. Vanke recorded a net profit of 9.9 billion yuan during the same period in 2023 despite facing economic headwinds.

The company is part-owned by the city government of Shenzhen in southern China — once seen as a guarantee of its solidity. China's real estate market is grappling with unprecedented challenges, with some developers on the verge of bankruptcy and lower property prices deterring consumers from making investments against a backdrop of a slowing economy.

Rating agency Moody's once again downgraded Vanke's credit rating by one notch this month to B1, signifying it was "highly speculative". The setbacks make Vanke the latest Chinese developer to be caught up in a mounting crisis within the real estate sector, following Evergrande and Country Garden.

The industry, which experienced two decades of meteoric growth as living standards rose across China, had long accounted for more than a quarter of the country's GDP. In a bid to revive activity, authorities have introduced various incentive measures and made announcements of state support. But those efforts have so far had little impact on the ailing sector. Major cities in China saw another drop in real estate prices in July, indicating demand is still weak. — AFP

Cash-loving investors dig in even as US rate cuts threaten payouts

WASHINGTON: A golden era for cash may be winding down as the Federal Reserve gets ready to cut interest rates. Many fans of the investment class are staying put anyway.

Assets in US money markets hit a record \$6.24 trillion this month, data from the Investment Company Institute showed on Aug. 21, even as markets became increasingly confident that the Fed was gearing up to lower rates at its Sept 17-18 meeting. Those reductions are expected to eventually pull yields in

The growing role of Islamic finance in PPP projects

By Hassan Abdulrahim

KUWAIT: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have become a crucial model for infrastructure development, enabling governments to leverage private sector expertise and funding to deliver essential public services. These partnerships are vital for addressing the growing demand for infrastructure in sectors such as transportation, healthcare, and education, particularly in emerging markets. In recent years, Islamic finance has gained prominence as a significant facilitator for financing PPP projects. Its ethical and asset-backed financing principles provide a robust alternative to conventional financing methods, making it increasingly relevant in the global landscape.

This section of our guide explores how Islamic finance facilitates PPP projects, the benefits it offers, and the potential challenges in integrating Islamic finance into PPP structures. Understanding Islamic Finance Islamic finance refers to financial activities conducted in accordance with Sharia (Islamic law), which prohibits the payment or receipt of interest (riba), excessive uncertainty (gharar), and speculative activities (maysir).

Instead, Islamic finance emphasizes risk-sharing, asset-backed transactions, and ethical investing. These principles promote justice, fairness, and economic stability, ensuring that financial activities contribute positively to society.

Key instruments in Islamic finance include:

Sukuk (Islamic Bonds): Sukuk represents a share in the ownership of an asset or a business venture, offering returns derived from the asset's performance. Unlike conventional bonds, sukuk holders receive profit sharing based on the actual earnings of the underlying asset rather than fixed interest payments. Murabaha (cost-plus financing): In Murabaha, the financier purchases an asset and sells it to the client at a marked-up price, allowing deferred payment. This is widely used for trade financing and short-term liquidity requirements.

Ijara (leasing): Ijara is a lease agreement where the financier purchases an asset and leases it to the client for a fixed period. Ownership may be transferred to the client at the end of the lease term, making it suitable for long-term infrastructure projects. Mudarabah and Musharakah (profit and loss sharing): These equity based financing structures involve partnerships where profits and losses are shared according to pre-agreed ratios. Mudarabah involves one party providing capital and the other managing the project, while Musharakah involves joint capital investment and management.

money markets down from above 5 percent, a rate unimaginable a few years ago. So far, however, there is little evidence that individual investors are abandoning cash to chase returns in stocks and bonds. Some \$100 billion flowed into money markets in August, according to data analysis firm EPFR.

"We don't feel any need to move our money," said Vance Arnold, a 71-year-old retired teacher and baseball coach from Fayetteville, Arkansas, who has about 80 percent of his seven-figure portfolio in money markets and other cash equivalents.

Money-market yields went from near-zero to "4.5 percent, 4.7 percent, and now we're over 5.2 percent. I can live with 4.5 percent again," he said. The durability of money markets is a recent example of how cash has reemerged as an asset class that can compete with stocks and bonds, one of the most striking shifts in the post-COVID investment landscape. As-

The growing role

The integration of Islamic finance in PPP projects has become increasingly attractive for several reasons. The principles of risk-sharing, ethical investments, and asset-backed financing align well with the nature of PPPs, which involve substantial capital investment and long-term commitments. Below are key ways in which Islamic finance serves as a significant facilitator for PPP projects:

Alignment with ethical and social objectives

Islamic finance is founded on ethical principles that emphasize justice, fairness, and social responsibility. It prohibits investments in industries considered harmful to society, such as alcohol, gambling, and weapons. This ethical alignment resonates with the objectives of PPP projects, which aim to provide public goods and services that improve community welfare. The focus on ethical investments enhances trust among stakeholders, including governments, private investors, and the general public, ensuring that PPP projects contribute positively to societal well-being.

Risk sharing and asset-backed financing

A fundamental principle of Islamic finance is risk-sharing, which reduces the financial burden on individual parties. In PPP projects, risks related to construction, operation, and revenue generation can be substantial. Islamic finance, through instruments like Musharakah and Mudarabah, promotes joint risk-sharing, aligning the interests of public and private partners. Additionally, the asset-backed nature of Islamic finance ensures that financing is tied to tangible assets, providing security for investors and mitigating the risk of speculative losses. This approach creates a stable financial environment conducive to the long-term success of PPP projects.

Attracting a broader investor base

The global Islamic finance market has grown significantly, with total assets estimated to exceed \$3 trillion. This growth has attracted a diverse range of investors, including those who prioritize ethical and investments. By utilizing Islamic finance for PPP projects, governments and private sector partners can tap into this expanding pool of investors. This inclusivity is particularly beneficial in regions with substantial Muslim populations, where Islamic finance resonates with cultural and religious values, leading to increased investor participation and enhanced project funding.

Supporting sustainable development

Islamic finance inherently supports sustainable development by avoiding speculative activities and focusing on projects with real economic and social value. This aligns with the goals of many PPP projects, which aim to provide essential infrastructure and services that promote economic growth and improve the quality of life. By financing PPP projects through Islamic finance, stakeholders can ensure that investments are directed towards sustainable and responsible ventures, contributing to long-term economic stability and development.

Examples of Islamic finance in PPP projects

Several successful PPP projects have been financed using Islamic finance, demonstrating its effectiveness as a facilitator.

1) The Az-Zour North Independent Water and Power Project (IWPP) in Kuwait: One of the landmark PPP projects in Kuwait that utilized Islamic finance is the Az-Zour

North IWPP. This project, which was the first in Kuwait to be developed under the PPP model, involves the construction and operation of a power and water desalination plant. Islamic finance played a crucial role in funding this project, with a significant portion of the financing arranged through sukuk issuance and Islamic financing structures. The project's success demonstrated the viability of using Islamic finance to fund large-scale infrastructure projects, attracting both local and international investors. It also paved the way for future PPP projects in Kuwait, showcasing the potential of Islamic finance to support the country's infrastructure development goals.

2) King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: This major infrastructure project was partially funded through sukuk issuance, providing a Sharia-compliant investment opportunity. The use of sukuk enabled the project to raise significant capital while adhering to Islamic financial principles, supporting the expansion and modernization of one of the region's busiest airports.

3) Malaysia's Infrastructure Development: Malaysia has been a pioneer in integrating Islamic finance into its infrastructure development strategy. The government has used Islamic finance instruments to fund various PPP projects, including highways, hospitals, and educational institutions. Malaysia's robust regulatory framework and supportive policies have facilitated the successful deployment of Islamic finance in PPP projects, fostering economic growth and improving public services.

4) Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA) Project: In the UAE, Islamic finance was used to fund the expansion of water desalination and power generation facilities. This PPP project employed Ijara and Murabaha structures to finance the necessary infrastructure, ensuring compliance with Sharia principles while attracting investment from Islamic financial institutions. Challenges in Integrating Islamic Finance into PPP Projects While Islamic finance offers numerous advantages for financing PPP projects, certain challenges need to be addressed:

Regulatory Frameworks: The lack of standardized regulatory frameworks for Islamic finance across different jurisdictions can create inconsistencies and complexities in structuring PPP projects. Developing clear guidelines and standards for Islamic finance in PPPs is essential to ensure transparency and ease of implementation. Awareness and Understanding: There is a need for greater awareness and understanding of Islamic finance principles among stakeholders, including public officials, private sector partners, and investors. Education and training programs can help bridge this knowledge gap, enabling stakeholders to effectively utilize Islamic finance in PPP projects.

Product Innovation: While Islamic finance offers a range of financing instruments, further innovation is needed to develop products specifically tailored to the unique requirements of PPP projects. Financial institutions must collaborate with governments and industry experts to create innovative solutions that meet the needs of both public and private partners.

Market Development: In some regions, the Islamic finance market is still developing, with limited availability of Islamic financial products and services. Efforts to promote market development, including the establishment of Islamic finance hubs and the introduction of supportive policies, are crucial for enhancing the role of Islamic finance in PPPs.

Note: Hassan Abdulrahim is Senior Instructor, Economics & Finance, at Canadian College, Kuwait and Deputy CEO at Visionary Consulting Company

Cash has returned an average of 2 percent in the 12 months after the Fed starts cutting interest rates, while stocks have returned 11 percent and Treasury bonds gained 5 percent, according to a study by Hartford Funds of rate-cutting cycles since 1928. Anne Marie Stonich, chief wealth strategist at Coldstream Wealth Management in Seattle, has been urging clients to move out of cash and into assets such as government bonds, where they can lock in yields if they hold the securities to term. Her efforts have met resistance from cash-loving investors, she said.

"It's easy to have been complacent, but now it's time to wake up and pay attention to moving your cash onward," Stonich said. Investors' dedication to cash could be tested if a weakening economy prompts the Fed to cut rates faster or deeper than expected. Such a scenario could conversely raise the appeal of haven assets if growth worries prompt a stock selloff. — Reuters

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

New York's Met Museum: A global treasure trove of artistic heritage



The Temple of Dendur, an old Egyptian temple from the Roman period, awarded to the Met Museum.



The entrance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. — KUNA photos



A piece of ground mosaic from the Byzantine Empire era.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, widely known as "The Met," is the largest and most prominent cultural landmark in the United States, offering an unparalleled experience for art enthusiasts and history lovers alike. As the fourth-largest museum in the world, The Met, dazzles visitors with its extraordinary collection of over two million artworks spanning 5,000 years of history and diverse civilizations.

Since its founding in 1870, The Met has been a beacon of inspiration, drawing millions of visitors annually with its timeless collections, engaging events, and enriching educational programs. Beyond its galleries, the museum also houses a comprehensive research library containing over a million volumes, as well as an extensive array of publications and catalogues, further cementing its role as a global center for art and culture. — KUNA



Autumn Rhythm, one of Jackson Pollock's most notable paintings.



Modern European art paintings.



A piece of ground mosaic from the Byzantine Empire era.



Quran manuscript from the Ottoman Interregnum.

Panda pair in Tokyo to return to China

Two ageing pandas at a Tokyo zoo will be returned to China next month for medical care, the city's governor said, with visitors queuing on Saturday to catch their last glimpse of the couple. The pandas Ri Ri and Shin Shin arrived at Ueno Zoo in 2011 and were due to stay until February 2026, but Japan and China agreed it would be better for the 19-year-olds to return to their home country.

"Symptoms such as high blood pressure have been observed since two years ago. They're currently taking medication and undergoing tests, but there has been no significant improvement," Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike told reporters on Friday.

"I know some people will be sad to see them go,

but when we think first of the health of the beloved pandas, it would be best to see them off warmly."

A final viewing is scheduled for September 28, but local media reported on Saturday that people were already lining up to get one last look at the pandas. The pair gave birth in 2017 to cub Xiang Xiang - the zoo's first baby panda since 1988, who became a massive draw - as well as twins in 2021.

Many fans shed tears when Xiang Xiang was returned to China last year, and her departure was broadcast live on local television.

The black and white mammals are immensely popular around the world, and China loans them out as part of a "panda diplomacy" programme to foster foreign ties. There are an estimated 1,860 giant pandas left in the wild, mainly in bamboo forests in the mountains of China, according to environmental group WWF. And there are about 600 in captivity in panda centres, zoos and wildlife parks around the world. — AFP



Female giant panda Shin Shin rests in her enclosure at Tokyo's Ueno zoo on August 31, 2024. — AFP photos



This file picture taken on May 24, 2017 shows female giant panda Shin Shin eating bamboo in her enclosure at Tokyo's Ueno zoo.

Syrian artist destroys statue outside UN in political message



Syrian exiled sculptor Khaled Dawwa destroys his giant art work "The King of Holes", depicting a potentate with a massive body, to stage a protest on the occasion of International Day of the Disappeared, in front of the United Nations offices in Geneva, on August 30, 2024. — AFP photos



Syrian exiled sculptor Khaled Dawwa (center) destroys his giant art work "The King of Holes".

Syrian sculptor Khaled Dawwa on Friday destroyed his giant artwork outside the United Nations office in Geneva to denounce tens of thousands of enforced disappearances in Syria.

Using saws and hammers, relatives of disappeared Syrians helped the artist break apart the wood, plaster and foam statue on the International Day of the Disappeared. "We are here to protest against the system, to say, 'enough! We have a right to know the truth,'" the 39-year-old sculptor, who lives in exile in France, told AFP. Dawwa's 3.5 metre (11ft 6 inch) - high colossus, "The King of Holes", depicted a potentate with a massive body, reflecting the artist's condemnation of oppressive power, before it was thrashed to pieces.

The idea for the protest came from rights group Syria Campaign, which suggested that Dawwa tear down the installation outside the UN headquarters.

He created it in 2021 in Paris with the intention of demolishing it later. "It is a fragile piece that is difficult to keep," he said. Dawwa took part in Syria's so-called Arab Spring demonstrations in 2012 that escalated into a bloody, protracted war.

He was in his studio in May 2013 when he was se-

verely wounded by bullet fragments from a government helicopter and jailed for two months after leaving hospital. Echoing the conflict, the legs, face and arms of the artwork are riddled with small holes.

Amongst the rights campaigners on site was Wafa Mustafa, 34, who has not heard from her father since he was arrested in 2013.

"This statue, to all the Syrian families here, does not represent only the Assad regime" which is mainly "responsible for the detention of our loved ones", the Syria Campaign activist told AFP.

"But also it represents the international community and the UN that has failed us for the past 13 years" and "has not provided any real action to stop the massacre in Syria, and to give Syrians their basic human rights," she said.

Families in 'pain'

Around 100,000 people have disappeared in the Syria as part of government repression or kidnappings by anti-regime militias, according to several non-profit organizations.

Ahmad Helmi, 34, said he had fled Syria after he was arrested by the country's secret services as a university student, and jailed for three years. He followed Dawwa to Geneva to help him destroy the statue. — AFP

Fans struggle as tickets for Oasis reunion tour go on sale

Millions of Oasis fans queued online early Saturday to buy tickets for the British legends' eagerly-awaited reunion tour next year, but many were frustrated after booking websites appeared overwhelmed. The chaotic scramble for tickets follows the announcement Tuesday that brothers Noel and Liam Gallagher had ended their infamous 15-year feud and were reuniting the 1990s-founded band for the tour.

Tickets for 15 UK concerts next July and August — kicking off what has been billed as a worldwide tour — were expected to sell out within minutes of going on sale at 9:00 am (0800 GMT). Two mid-August gigs in the Irish capital Dublin also went on sale an hour earlier. But fans in both countries reported struggling to access tickets, with hundreds of thousands left in online queues for different dates — or just to join the official waiting list. Others were unable to even access the websites selling them.

Manchester-based promoter SJM Concerts' site, Gigs and Tours, faced issues even before the UK sale started, with an error message telling fans to "please bear with us" as it failed to load. Meanwhile Ticketmaster's UK and Irish websites seemed overloaded as millions tried to access them, with some buyers unable to complete purchases even after finishing lengthy queues. An AFP reporter at the final stage of the purchase process after waiting on-



A fan uses a smartphone to access an online ticket sales website to purchase tickets for Oasis' "Live '25" tour at home in Marsden, northern England, on Aug 31, 2024. — AFP

line for several hours was abruptly dumped to the back of the queue for one date, suddenly behind nearly 200,000 others.

Memes

A Ticketmaster spokesperson said "millions of fans are accessing our site so have been placed in a queue" but insisted that it was "moving along" and the site had not crashed. Exasperated fans were unimpressed,

with social media full of memes and mockery. "Unfortunately, Oasis have split up while you were in the queue," joked one X account. "Can we just go back to the old days of queuing outside the record shop or gig venue to buy tickets please?" said another.

Some lucky fans snagged a small number of tickets in a Friday evening pre-sale, after they won the chance in a heavily oversubscribed ballot. But some of those tickets promptly appeared on resale sites at heavily inflated prices, some as high as £6,000 (\$7,875). That prompted Oasis to warn on X that "tickets sold in breach of the terms and conditions will be canceled".

The group behind hit songs including "Wonderwall", "Don't Look Back In Anger" and "Champagne Supernova" will stage 17 gigs in Cardiff, Manchester, London, Edinburgh and Dublin. The much-anticipated Tuesday announcement also promised concerts in "continents outside of Europe later next year". Tickets for their UK events start at around £75 (\$98), rising to around £150 for standing in front of the stage. The most expensive at London's Wembley stadium — which include extras such as a pre-show party — will cost buyers more than £500.

'Spark'

Formed in Manchester, northwest England, in 1991, Oasis helped create the Britpop era of that

decade, enjoying a fierce rivalry with London band Blur. The Gallagher brothers became notorious for their public fights, which came to a head at a 2009 Paris festival, when Liam broke one of Noel's guitars. That was the last time they played together, although each has regularly performed the group's hits to sold-out crowds.

The reunion tour will take place 30 years after Oasis's 1995 album "(What's the Story) Morning Glory?", which received international critical and commercial acclaim. It will kick off over two nights at the Principality Stadium in the Welsh capital Cardiff from July 4, 2025, followed a week later by five gigs at Heaton Park in their hometown, Manchester.

Oasis will then play Wembley — on July 25, 26 and 30 as well as August 2 and 3 — before three nights at Murrayfield Stadium in the Scottish capital Edinburgh, on August 8, 9 and 12. Two more performances at Dublin's Croke Park in mid-August are scheduled. The band has promised sets "full of wall-to-wall classics", showcasing the "charisma, spark and intensity that only comes when Liam and Noel Gallagher are on-stage together". British hoteliers and pub owners are among those hoping for a boom in business, akin to the economic boost in numerous places prompted by Taylor Swift's recent tour. — AFP

Angelina Jolie as the tormented 'Divina' Callas at Venice

Angelina Jolie returns to the limelight at the Venice Film Festival on Thursday as Maria Callas, "La Divina", whose rich voice, glamorous persona, and tragic love affair mesmerized audiences around the world. In "Maria", the modern-day movie star will strive to capture the transcendent dramatic presence and tormented life of one of opera's most resplendent divas in a biopic from Chilean director Pablo Larraín. The film that premieres on the Lido Thursday evening, on the festival's second day, is the last in Larraín's trilogy of movies about iconic real-life women — after 2021's "Spencer" about Lady Di and 2016's "Jackie" about Jacqueline Kennedy.

The director has said only a larger-than-life star in her own right could play the role of the American-born Greek singer. Enter Jolie. "This is the greatest diva of the 20th century, and who could play that?" Larraín told Vanity Fair last week. "I didn't want to work with someone that didn't have that already. I needed an actress who would naturally and organically be that diva, carry that weight, be that presence. Angelina was there."

Absent from the screen since 2021, the 49-year-old American actress and director has kept a relatively low profile even as her lengthy, acrimonious divorce from Brad Pitt continues to make headlines. The public's fascination with Jolie's private life has parallels with Callas's, whose stormy life and loves — including her relationship with the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, who left her for Jacqueline Kennedy — were similarly fodder for the tabloids.

But while the paparazzi will be out in full force Thursday, Jolie — who was spotted in the Venice heat Tuesday cloaked in a Christian Dior trench coat — will not cross paths with Pitt during her visit. Pitt's action comedy "Wolfs", in which he

and George Clooney play rival professional fixers, is playing out of competition on the Lido on Sunday, as purposely planned by festival organizers to avoid awkward encounters.

'Very scary'

One of 21 films in competition for Venice's prestigious Golden Lion prize, "Maria" centers on Callas's final, isolated years in Paris in the 1970s, as she looks back at her life and career before her death at age 53 from a heart attack. Jolie reportedly studied six months for the role, training herself to mimic the singer's cadences and tones as the film mixes in her own voice with that of the celebrated soprano. "You can't make a movie like this with an actress that is not actually singing it," Larraín told Vanity Fair. "This is the real thing — it was very scary for her, but she did it."

While some critics found flaws with Callas's voice, it was nevertheless deeply expressive, able to impart dramatic intensity to any role, which combined with her beauty and majestic stage presence prompting frenzied standing ovations. A towering talent with a tireless work ethic, Callas was often portrayed as a "temperamental" star, a label she rejected, defending herself as a disciplined perfectionist with high standards. She single-handedly revived the 19th-century bel canto operas of Donizetti, Rossini and Bellini — whose "Norma" was one of Callas's signature roles. Callas died in 1977. — AFP



US actress Angelina Jolie attends the photocall of the movie "Maria".



(From left) Italian actor Pierfrancesco Favino, US actress Angelina Jolie, director Pablo Larraín and Italian actress Alba Rohrwacher attend the photocall of the movie "Maria", a biopic on Maria Callas, during the 81st International Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP photos



The cast of the movie "Maria" (from left) Italian actor Pierfrancesco Favino, US actress Angelina Jolie, director Pablo Larraín and Italian actress Alba Rohrwacher pose at the Excelsior pier during the 81st Venice International Film Festival.

Divas never die: Eternal appeal of opera singer Maria Callas

Nearly 47 years after her death, one of opera's greatest stars, Greek soprano Maria Callas, is again taking centre stage at the Venice Film Festival played by Angelina Jolie in a new biopic. The film "Maria" by Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín — who has previously tackled other female icons including Jackie Kennedy and Princess Diana — portrays the final days of a singer whose voice and style forever marked the world of opera. Here are some of the turning points in the life of "La Divina".

A star is born

Callas received a standing ovation hailing her arrival as a new star as the curtain fell on the last act of Ponchielli's "La Gioconda" in Verona, Italy, on August 2, 1947. She was born Sophia Cecilia Anna Maria Kalogeropoulou on December 2, 1923, in New York — her family name later shortened to Callas. Her family later moved back to Greece, where she started performing at the age of eight.

In Verona she met Giovanni Battista Meneghini, a wealthy industrialist who was passionate about opera. Twenty-eight years her senior, he became her impresario and then husband in 1949. In 1954 she lost around 30 kilos (66 pounds) and transformed herself into the ultimate diva, taking top parts in the most well-known operas.

The Rome scandal

On January 2, 1958, Callas opened the Rome season with "Norma" in the presence of Italy's president, Giovanni Gronchi. But at the end of the first act, she lost her voice and refused to continue. The temperamental diva was accused of being capricious as there had been whistles during one of her arias. But she insisted to the media: "As you could see, I could no longer speak."

Onassis, her great love

In 1959 Callas left Meneghini to embark on a passionate nine-year affair with Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis. "Late at night one could see him, with Callas, in an Athens taverna where, having taken off his jacket and undone his tie, he showered the orchestra with gold and broke, as is Greek custom, piles of plates," AFP reported. In 1968 Onassis left Callas to marry



Maria Callas attends the premiere of the show by the American comedian, Jerry Lewis, at the Olympia Theatre in Paris, in April 1971. — AFP

Jackie Kennedy, the widow of assassinated US president John F. Kennedy.

Curtain call

Callas turned her back on opera in 1965. On February 20 she triumphed in "Tosca" in Paris. "The moment she appeared in the church in the first act, in a pink dress wrapped in a large deep-orange scarf, her arms full of flowers, the applause was such that it drowned out the music and the first lines were inaudible," AFP wrote. But during a performance on May 29, she fell ill. On July 5, she took to the stage despite the advice of her doctor for the last time in London, with Queen Elizabeth II in the audience.

A final tour

In 1973 Callas undertook an international tour of recitals. In Paris, "bouquets rained onto the stage", accompanied by standing ovations and cries of "Vive Maria!", AFP wrote, even if the critics were "less enthusiastic".

Her last breath

Callas died at her Paris home on September 16, 1977, aged 53, after a heart attack. "I have just seen her on her bed," said Michel Glotz, her former artistic director, in an AFP report. "It was the image itself of 'La Traviata' as she performed it in 1956 at Milan's La Scala. There was not a line on her face. It seems like she was just resting," he said. — AFP

Oscar-winner blasts Trump's 'mean' handling of migrant children

Film legend Errol Morris said the separation of thousands of migrant children from their parents by Donald Trump's US administration was "inhumane and cruel" as his new documentary about the policy premiered at the Venice Film Festival Thursday. "Do we need borders? Do we need immigration law? We do," the Oscar-winning US director told AFP ahead of the screening of his film "Separated". "But the idea is laws should be fair and humane." "And this particular policy struck me, still strikes me, as inhumane, as cruel as mean."

In 2017, during Donald Trump's first year as US president, his administration raised the idea of separating children from their parents as a way to deter illegal immigration — a key plank of his campaign. Officially launched in April 2018, the "zero-tolerance" policy allowed criminal proceedings to be brought against anyone who crossed the US-Mexico border illegally, resulting in parents being immediately taken into custody without their children. According to the documentary, which cited official government figures, at least 4,227 children were taken from their parents — and more than 1,000 are still separated. "What horrifies me is that they didn't keep records. They separated families in such a way that it might be impossible ever to reunite them," said Morris, 76. The veteran director won an Oscar in 2004 for "The Fog of War", an astonishingly frank account of the Vietnam War by one its architects, former US secretary of defense Robert McNamara.

Divisive

Morris's new film — being shown out of competition in Venice — is based on a book by US journalist Jacob Soboroff, who helped expose the desperate plight of the children. "He had called me and asked me if I knew anybody who might be willing to turn his book into a movie... I volunteered myself," Morris said. The documentary is largely based on statements by Jonathan White, who was deputy director of the US Office



Director Errol Morris

for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at the time and who opposed the policy applied by his superior, Scott Lloyd, who is also interviewed.

Lawsuits and a public outcry, even among Trump's own Republican Party, forced the administration by mid-2018 to halt the separations. In practice, however, the Trump administration continued to separate families under another regulation which allowed undocumented parents to be arrested and deported if they had committed a serious crime.

Immigration remains a hugely divisive issue for many Americans ahead of November's presidential election, in which Trump is running against Vice President Kamala Harris. A recent official US report found the government may have lost track of up to 32,000 unaccompanied migrant children in the past four years. — AFP

Swiss city of Basel to host Eurovision 2025

Basel will host the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest after the Swiss border city was chosen Friday to stage the 69th edition of the glitzy annual TV extravaganza. Swiss singer Nemo's 2024 Eurovision victory gave Switzerland the right to host next year's event, with a huge global audience guaranteed.

Right on the borders with France and Germany, Switzerland's third-biggest city was given the nod ahead of Geneva. The contest will be staged at the St. Jakobshalle indoor arena, with semi-finals set for May 13 and 15, while the final is to take place on May 17.

"Basel's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe makes it the ideal setting for an event that celebrates the power of music to connect people across borders," Eurovision executive supervisor Martin Osterdahl said in a statement.

From its earnest black-and-white 1950s beginnings, Eurovision has ballooned into a colourful giant kitsch celebration that never takes itself too seriously.

The contest puts host cities in the spotlight, with 163 million viewers worldwide watching this year's event in Malmo, Sweden, where Nemo triumphed in May with the highly personal song "The Code".

Hosting also has a knock-on boost for the hotel and tourism industries as Eurovision fanatics, artists and country delegations flock in.

Football stadium party zone

Opened in 1976, St. Jakobshalle styles itself as Switzerland's top multi-purpose arena. The venue can hold more than 12,000 spectators.

Fans without golden tickets for the arena will be able to flock to the 40,000-capacity St. Jakob-Park football stadium across the street to watch the final on a giant screen, and see performances by former Eurovision stars.

Meanwhile the Steinvorstadt district, known for its bars and cinemas, will be transformed into "Eurovision Street". "It is a great honor for Basel to be able to host the world's biggest live music event!" said Conradin Cramer, president of the Basel city authority. On the River Rhine, Basel is an international hub for the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, hosting the headquarters of Novartis and Roche.

But it also has its cultural side, with several internationally-renowned museums, and the annual Art Basel event, the world's top contemporary art fair.

Four down to one

The decision was made by the host broadcaster SRG, and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) public service media alliance which owns Eurovision.

The venue, public transport links, sustainability, hotel accommodation, security, investment, event experience and the support from the city were key factors in the decision.

Following a surge of early enthusiasm from Swiss cities after Nemo's victory, only four formal bids emerged by the end of June deadline.

Zurich, plus Bern in conjunction with Nemo's hometown Biel, were eliminated in mid-July, leaving just Geneva and Basel in play.

The financial demands of hosting Eurovision - and, from a minor Christian fundamentalist party, fear of



A picture taken early on April 5, 2023 shows the two towers (right), designed by architects Herzog and de Meuron, housing the headquarters of Swiss pharma giant Roche in Basel.—AFP

the occult - sparked threats of local referendums that could throw a spanner in the works.

Swiss voters are used to having a direct say on how their taxes are spent, and some were bristling at the potential costs and hassle of bringing the Eurovision circus to town.

Eurovision is a non-profit event, mostly financed by weighted contributions from participating EBU broadcasters. Eurovision says that "given the benefits that will flow" to host cities, they must make also make a contribution.

The Basel-City authority is looking at putting in 34.9 million Swiss francs (\$41.5 million), subject to a vote in the city assembly on September 11.

Shadow of Celine Dion

Nemo's victory was only the third time Switzerland had won Eurovision.

Lys Assia won the first-ever contest in 1956 with "Refrain". Canadian then-starlet Celine Dion triumphed for Switzerland in 1988 singing "Ne partez pas sans moi", launching her career internationally.

Switzerland staged the 1956 contest at the Teatro Kursaal in Lugano and declined to host again in 1957, while the 1989 event was held in the Palais de Beaulieu in Lausanne.

After being staged in the Italian- and then French-speaking regions, Basel will therefore bring Eurovision to the main German-speaking part of Switzerland for the first time. — AFP



Italian fashion designer Andrea Incontri

Incontri was hired by Renon in July 2022 to rejuvenate the group's collection. Incontri was previously the artistic director of Italian luxury shoe company Tod's from 2014 to 2019.

Created in 1965 in the northeast of Italy by four siblings, the "United Colors of Benetton" went global in the 1980s with its soft wool sweaters and the shock advertising of photographer Oliviero Toscani.

But the company's sales have stagnated since the early 2000s. — AFP



Photo shows Nick Cave on June 2023. — AFP

That record was imbued with the memory of his son Arthur, 15. The teenager died in 2015 in a cliff fall in Brighton on England's south coast after taking LSD for the first time.

In 2022, Cave also lost another son, 31-year-old Jethro Lazenby, whose cause of death has not been made public. Cave has shared his grief with his fans in songs and at concerts.

But "Wild" marks a new phase in the grieving process. "The record does not shy away from certain things. It reveals the capacity to feel other emotions," he said. Physically, Cave looks like he has not changed in years. "I don't know what it was. Twenty years of heroin addiction? And a good face cream," he joked.

'Disgraceful self indulgence'

But the double tragedy has changed him profoundly. He has admitted on Australian television that for a long time he had been "in awe of my own genius".

Back then his life consisted of sitting in his office and writing every day. Everything else was just "peripheral".

Since the death of his sons, however, "this just collapsed completely and I just saw the folly of that, the kind of disgraceful self-indulgence of the whole thing", he told Australia's national broadcaster ABC. — AFP

Benetton artistic director leaves as it seeks return to profit

Italian clothing retailer Benetton said Friday that its creative director Andrea Incontri is leaving the group as part of a wider management overhaul to stem its losses. In a statement, the company said it is "aiming to define a management team to support its new director general in a new phase of rationalization and relaunch". It said Incontri's departure was by mutual decision.

The clothing group named Claudio Sforza as director general in late May to replace Massimo Renon, who had been publicly criticized by the company's 89-year-old founder Luciano Benetton for what he called a "100-million-euro hole" during his four years in charge. Benetton's net loss nearly tripled to 230 million euros (\$255 million) in 2023.

Nick Cave says grief gives way to 'hope' after tragedies

Australian cult rocker Nick Cave, known for his dark and stormy ballads, released his latest album Friday, a record he describes as "the light flooding in" again after the death of two sons.

Cave's last albums were haunted by the tragedies. But that sadness has now given way to joy.

It was a new Nick Cave who on Thursday evening in London greeted an audience of journalists and a few fans to present the new record.

Still dandy in trademark dark suit and long brown hair, the singer-composer, known for the unsparring emotional intensity of his lyrics, appeared relaxed and even light-hearted.

Nick Cave said "Wild", his 18th album with his band the Bad Seeds, was a "joyful record".

"Wild is the sound of the curtain drawn back and the light flooding in, a light that at times feels almost overwhelming. There is hope. Wonder too," he said.

The 66-year-old Australian, has a 40-plus year career behind him filling concert halls but has never become mainstream. One of his biggest hits was the macabre "Where the Wild Roses Grow" with Australian pop star Kylie Minogue in 1995.

More recently, the disturbing "Red Right Hand" was chosen as the theme song for the series Peaky Blinders, about Birmingham gangsters.

The music on the new album is intense, softened by choirs. Tracks that he particularly likes include "Frogs" and "Conversion".

Double tragedy

It's a notable shift from his last album with the Bad Seeds, "Ghosteen" (2019).

Matthew Perry doctor ordered not to practice medicine ahead of guilty plea

A doctor who has agreed to plead guilty in connection with the overdose death of "Friends" actor Matthew Perry was ordered Friday by a judge not to practice medicine.

Mark Chavez, 54, who will admit conspiracy to distribute ketamine as part of a plea deal reached with authorities, was released on \$50,000 bond at a Los Angeles court.

Chavez is one of five people facing federal charges over the October 2023 tragedy in which Perry, a longtime addict, was found unresponsive in the pool at his luxury Los Angeles home.

Two others caught in the dragnet - a live-in assistant and an acquaintance - have already agreed to plead guilty to their charges.

Another doctor - Salvador Plasencia - allegedly bought ketamine off Chavez and sold it to the desperate star at hugely inflated prices, musing "I wonder how much this moron will pay."

Jasveen Sangha, the alleged "Ketamine Queen" who supplied drugs to high-end clients and celebrities, is charged with selling Perry the dose that killed him. Both Plasencia and Sangha face one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine, as well as a raft of other charges, which they have denied.

Their trials have been set for October, and both face lengthy prison terms if found guilty.

Chavez, who admitted in his plea agreement to selling ketamine to Plasencia, including doses that he had diverted from his former ketamine clinic, is expected to formally enter his plea in the coming days or weeks.

Perry played Chandler Bing on the hit TV sitcom from 1994 to 2004 and talked openly of his decades-long battles with addiction. He had been taking ketamine, a controlled drug, as part of supervised therapy.

Doctors and veterinarians use ketamine as an anesthetic, and researchers have explored its use as a treatment for depression.



Mark Chavez, the "ketamine doctor" who is charged in connection with actor Matthew Perry's death from an accidental ketamine overdose, listens to his attorney Matthew Binninger speak to the media as they leave the Royal Federal Courthouse in Los Angeles after his court appearance on August 30, 2024. — AFP

Underground users take it for its hallucinogenic effects, though it can be addictive and dangerous for people with underlying health problems.

"Friends," which followed the lives of six New Yorkers navigating adulthood, dating and careers, drew a massive global following and made megastars of previously unknown actors.

Perry's role as the sarcastic man-child Chandler brought him fabulous wealth, but hid a dark struggle with addiction to painkillers and alcohol.

In 2018, he suffered a drug-related burst colon, and underwent multiple surgeries.

In his 2022 memoir "Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing," Perry described going through detox dozens of times. "I have mostly been sober since 2001," he wrote, "save for about sixty or seventy little mishaps." — AFP

K-pop agency vows 'strongest legal action' against deepfake videos

A major K-pop agency has vowed to take the "strongest legal action" against deepfake videos depicting its artists, after local media reports exposing Telegram chat rooms for sharing AI-generated pornography sparked public outrage.

South Korea is the country most susceptible to deepfake porn, according to a 2023 report by cybersecurity startup Security Hero, with singers and actresses from the rising cultural powerhouse accounting for 53 percent of the individuals featured in the content it reviewed. "We are gravely concerned about the recent spread of deepfake videos involving our artists," said a statement issued late Friday by K-pop agency JYP Entertainment, whose artists include the popular girl group TWICE.

"We are in the process of collecting all relevant evidence to pursue the strongest legal action with a leading law firm, without leniency."

Earlier this week, President Yoon Suk Yeol called for an investigation into deepfake porn, with relevant agencies and police saying around 60 percent of victims were minors.

According to media reports, victims have included soldiers, teachers and students.

JYP's announcement comes about two months after fellow K-pop label ADOR said police were inves-

tigating the creators and distributors profiting from obscene deepfake content depicting the firm's hugely popular girl group NewJeans.

Some of the offenders had already been convicted and sentenced, ADOR said at the time.

Activists say South Korea is plagued by an acute epidemic of digital sex crimes, including spycams and revenge porn, with inadequate legislation to punish offenders.

In 2019, K-pop star Goo Hara took her own life after falling victim to "revenge porn" - private sex videos filmed or shared non-consensually by exes - and threats by a disgruntled ex-boyfriend.

And while South Korea is a leading technological power and increasingly a major exporter of its pop culture, it remains a socially conservative society with a poor record on women's rights.

In recent years, however, a new #MeToo generation has mobilized on a host of issues, including legalizing abortion, triggering an online backlash against so-called "radical feminism".

Before being elected, President Yoon had claimed South Korean women did not suffer from "systemic gender discrimination", despite evidence to the contrary in the form of gaps in wages and workforce participation. He won office in 2022 in part on a campaign pledge to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality, with some of his supporters going so far as to label the women's movement a "mental illness". — AFP



South Korean K-pop group 'Twice'. — AFP

Sports

China extend lead in Paralympic medals table after track success

'Lightning strikes three times' for world's fastest Paralympian

PARIS: China began to exert its traditional dominance at the Paralympics in Paris on Friday, pulling ahead of second-placed Great Britain despite a double gold medal success for British swimmers. The Chinese, who have topped the medal standings at every Paralympics since Athens in 2004, finished the second day of competition with 12 golds, a performance that included three golds on the first day of the athletics program. Britain have six golds after Tully Kearney, who has cerebral palsy, and Maisie Summers-Newton both defended their titles from the Tokyo Paralympics three years ago.

Kearney won the women's 100m freestyle in the S5 category while Summers-Newton, who was born with achondroplasia, a condition that affects bone development, came home first in the women's 200m individual medley SM6. "I was really nervous, it's something that's come from Tokyo," Summers-Newton, a qualified primary school teacher, told reporters. "There's a lot of pressure being Paralympic champion." Earlier, Zhou Xia won China's first gold medal of the athletics events when she sprinted to the women's T35 100m title, for competitors with impaired coordination, in a time of 13.58sec.

Di Dongdong added the men's long jump title for athletes with visual impairment by smashing the world record with a 6.85m jump and Wen Xiaoyan added a gold in the T37 women's 200m. The wheelchair tennis tournament began at Roland Garros, the home of the French Open, under grey skies and morning rain. A large crowd, including a sizeable Zionist contingent, filed into the Suzanne Lenglen court to support singles player Adam Berdichevsky against Italy's Luca Arca.

After clinching a 6-2, 7-5 victory, Berdichevsky took a Zionist flag from his wife and three children and jogged around the court waving it. During the October 7 attack, Berdichevsky, his wife and three children hid in their house for several hours as Hamas fighters entered Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak, just two miles from Gaza. The family was eventually evacuated to a safe house. He said the experience had given him a new perspective on life. "I



SAINT-DENIS: (From left) An overview shows Bahrain's guide Abdullah Djimel and Bahrain's Husain Mohamed, Uzbekistan's guide Sardor Bakhtiyorov and Uzbekistan's Urganchbek Egamnazarov, France's guide Lucas Mathonat and France's Tresor Gauthier Makunda, Namibia's Ananias Shikongo and Namibia's guide Even Tjiuju (right) competing during the athletics Men's 400m - T11 heat 1 event during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, North of Paris, on August 31, 2024. — AFP

think it helps mentally because since then for me nothing is really important. If I lose, I lose. If I win, I win."

Giant Iranian sitting volleyball legend Morteza Mehrzad, who stands 8ft 1in (2.46m) tall, helped his country to a comfortable 3-0 win against Ukraine as they began their campaign for a fourth Paralympic title in five Games. In front of an enthusiastic Stade de France crowd of around 45,000 in the evening session, Brazil's Petrucio

Ferreira dos Santos, the fastest Paralympian in the world, won a third consecutive 100m title in the T47 class in a time of 10.68sec despite a track dotted with puddles.

Ferreira, who at the age of two lost his left arm below the elbow in an accident with a grinding machine, won gold medals in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 and smashed the para-world record in 2022 when he posted a time of 10.29sec. "I'm

happy, lightning has struck for the third time at the Paralympic Games and I'm coming home with another medal," Ferreira said. "That's three golds now at the Paralympics. It's an emotion that's hard to describe." His compatriot Julio Agripino dos Santos had earlier kicked off the athletics program by winning the men's T11 5,000m gold with a guide runner in a world record. — AFP

Mercedes pick teen Antonelli to replace Lewis Hamilton



MONZA: Formula 2 Italian driver Andrea Kimi Antonelli walks down the paddock at the Monza Circuit ahead of the Italy's Formula One Grand Prix, in Monza northern Italy. — AFP

MONZA: Italian teenager Andrea Kimi Antonelli will replace Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes once the seven-time world champion jumps ship for Ferrari at the end of the season, the Formula One team announced on Saturday. Rookie Antonelli, who celebrated his 18th birthday last weekend, will partner George Russell, another product of the team's junior program.

"Reaching F1 is a dream I've had since I was a small boy: I want to thank the team for the support they've given me in my career so far and the faith they've shown in me," said Antonelli in a statement. "I am still learning a lot, but I feel ready for the opportunity. I will be focused on getting better and delivering the best possible results for the team." Antonelli was picked by Mercedes even though his first ever F1 drive ended quickly and in spectacular fashion at Friday's first practice session for the Italian Grand Prix, smashing Russell's car into the trackside barriers at Monza with just four completed laps under his belt.

Given a chance by Mercedes to drive an F1 car, he lost control at the Parabolica turn 10 minutes into the session and seriously damaged the front end after ploughing through the gravel. Mercedes called the incident "unfortunate but all part of the learning curve". "He apologized first of all, and that is what you need to do when you bring a car back that looks a little bit like a Lego box falling on the floor," said team chief Toto Wolff on Friday.

Wolff was unperturbed by the crash, saying that "no one's interested in F1 anyway" and adding that Antonelli would get probably another chance in a Mercedes F1 car at the Mexican GP at the end of October.

Antonelli has had a stellar youth career until a brief lull at the start of this season. He won the 2022, Italian and German Formula 4 championships, the 2023 Middle East and European regional Formula championships.

This season, he skipped Formula 3 and went straight into the Formula 2 championship. After a slow start he scored his first victory in the sprint race at Silverstone at the beginning of July, before winning the main race in Budapest two weeks later. He is seventh in the championship with four rounds to go. — AFP

Djokovic falls to Popyrin in latest US Open shocker

NEW YORK: Novak Djokovic's latest bid for a record 25th Grand Slam title crashed to a halt on Friday as 28th-ranked Alexei Popyrin knocked the defending champion out of the US Open third round. One day after third seed Carlos Alcaraz slumped to a shock defeat against 74th-ranked Botic van de Zandschulp, 25-year-old Popyrin robbed the tournament of another superstar with a 6-4, 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 victory. Popyrin handed Djokovic his earliest US Open exit in 18 years and his earliest Grand Slam exit since he fell in the second round of the Australian Open in 2017 - which was also the last year the Serbian great failed to claim a single Grand Slam title.

Although he won the Olympic gold he had long coveted at the Paris Games, an uneven season that included knee surgery saw Djokovic come up empty in the majors. He had beaten Popyrin in three prior encounters, including at the Australian Open and Wimbledon this year. But a career-high 14 double faults - 49 unforced errors total - were too much for Djokovic to overcome.

"It was just an awful match for me," Djokovic said. "I mean, I tried so many things, and sometimes that's an issue ... you move away from the basics that work. You lose the foundation. You lose the movement, the timing, the rhythm, the tempo, everything, whether it's a serve or any other shot." Popyrin, coming off the biggest title of his career at the Montreal Masters, saved five break points in the sixth game of the match, swinging fearlessly to seize the first two sets. Djokovic gave himself some breathing room with an early break in the third. Popyrin clawed back only for Djokovic to break him twice more, the Serbian taking full advantage of Popyrin's mounting errors.

Morikawa closes in on Scheffler at Tour Championship

MIAMI: World number one Scottie Scheffler saw his lead in the race for the season-ending Tour Championship and FedEx Cup title cut to four strokes after Collin Morikawa fired a superb 63 in Friday's second round at East Lake. Scheffler, who began the season finale on 10-under, an advantage reflecting his top spot in the FedEx Cup standings, now sits on 21-under after his 5-under 66. The Masters champion had begun the day with a seven-stroke lead but it was not only Morikawa who closed the gap ahead of the weekend. Xander Schauffele bounced back from his disappointing 70 in the opening round, to card 64 and move within five strokes of Scheffler.

Scheffler was as solid as ever with five birdies, his sole blemish coming on the par-4 13th where he found two bunkers before missing a nine-foot putt for par. The American was happy with his performance even if he felt he had been unlucky on the greens. "I feel like my swing is in a good spot. I've hit it nice last couple days. Really felt like I've hit a lot of lips on the greens, but hitting a lot of quality putts," he said. "Today the putts that did not go in did not - a lot of them did not miss the cup by very much. A lot of quality stuff out there, and I'm in a good spot going into the weekend," he added.

But while the handicap system gives Scheffler a buffer of protection from his rivals, Morikawa appears determined to push the favorite all the way. The American reached the turn 4-under and while

But the Aussie responded in a tense fourth set, saving break points in the second game before breaking again for a 3-2 lead. He stayed patient as Djokovic saved three break points and when the Serbian double faulted to gift him another Popyrin capitalized with a blistering forehand winner and let out a massive roar. Djokovic delivered four double faults in dropping his serve to trail 5-2. He won the next two games, but Popyrin claimed the match with a love game.

"I was waiting for him to kind of step up," Popyrin said. "I didn't want to be one of those moments where Novak kind of stepped up and came back from two sets to love down. It was kind of extra motivation for me not to do that and to win that fourth set." Popyrin will next face Frances Tiafoe, who beat fellow American Ben Shelton 4-6, 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-3 in a pulsating afternoon contest on Arthur Ashe Stadium. Tiafoe avenged a quarter-final loss to Shelton in New York last year, withstanding 23 aces with a brilliant return display that saw him muster 21 break points and convert five.

Gauff rallies

Defending women's champion Coco Gauff survived late-match drama in a 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory over Elina Svitolina. Gauff's third-set surge had carried her to triple match point at 5-2, but she delivered a pair of double faults and Svitolina saved another with a blazing backhand on the way to a break. But Gauff broke Svitolina at love in the next game to lock up the win. Gauff next faces fellow American Emma Navarro, who upset her in the fourth round at Wimbledon. Navarro beat Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

Late show

All the drama on Ashe Stadium meant second-seeded Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka didn't get underway on the cavernous court that seats nearly 24,000 until eight minutes past midnight - the latest start to a match in US Open his-

he bogeyed the 11th he bounced back with birdies on the 13th and 14th. A late suspension of play for a storm warning threatened to disrupt his momentum, but Morikawa came out and birdied the last two holes to send a clear message to Scheffler.

"For me, it's just bringing energy and just kind of staying alive out there. I've got a game plan that I've set out, and I'm really going to stick to that, just knowing that we've got two more rounds left of the season," he said. Being paired with Scheffler allowed Morikawa to see his rival close-up but he said he remained focused on his own task. "He's such a good player that you just know he's going to keep going low and making birdies. I saw that firsthand. I've seen it for years. For me, it's just keep my foot on the gas," he said.

Schauffele put his Thursday struggles out of mind as he produced a bogey free round and came back out in the late evening, after the delay, to make birdie on the last. "It was better. It was nice to finish off with two big putts. Pretty dark out, so happy those two went in. Keeps the momentum from what was a pretty good round," said this year's British Open and PGA Championship winner. Schauffele said that Scheffler's lead meant there was no room for caution. "(Scottie's) been killing everyone at that all year. I know he's not going to let up, so there's only one way to get him," he said.

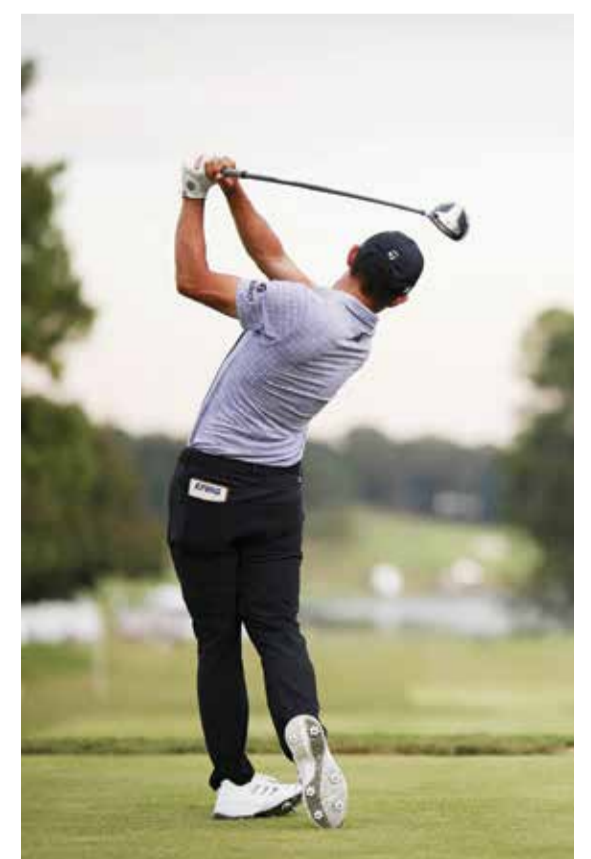
Australian Adam Scott and American Sahith Theegala and Wyndham Clark are all tied in fourth place on 12-under, nine behind Scheffler. Clark said there was no question of giving up the chase. It's going to be very tough to catch up with him. He'd have to not play his best and I'd have to play unbelievable. "I'm still chasing after that top spot, but I need some help. But a good round tomorrow, if I go shoot something 6-, 7-, 8-under, maybe he shoots even par and we're right in it," he said. — AFP



NEW YORK: Australia's Alexei Popyrin celebrates winning a break point and a game against Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their men's singles third round match on day five of the US Open tennis tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on August 30, 2024. — AFP

tory by eight minutes. She took it in stride, and after a slow start wrapped up a 2-6, 6-1, 6-2 victory over Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova at 1:48am. Men's fourth seed Alexander Zverev started earlier but labored later on Louis Armstrong Stadium, where he beat Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry 5-7, 7-5, 6-1, 6-3 in a match that ended at 2:35am - the second latest US Open finish ever.

World number six Andrey Rublev of Russia beat Czech Jiri Lehecka 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 and eighth-seeded Norwegian Casper Ruud rallied from two sets down to beat 19-year-old Shang Juncheng of China 6-7 (1/7), 3-6, 6-0, 6-3, 6-1. Seventh-seeded Olympic gold medalist Zheng Qinwen of China, who rallied from a set down in each of her first two matches, dispatched Germany's Jule Niemeier 6-2, 6-1. Zheng next faces Croatian Donna Vekic in a rematch of the Paris Olympics gold medal match. — AFP



ATLANTA, GEORGIA: Collin Morikawa of the United States hits his shot from the 18th tee during the second round of the TOUR Championship at East Lake Golf Club on August 30, 2024. — AFP

Sports

Chelsea, Sancho seal deal; Sterling joins Arsenal on loan at 11th hour

A frenzy transfer deadline day in the Premier League



Jadon Sancho

MANCHESTER: Chelsea reportedly agreed a deal to sign Jadon Sancho from Manchester United as Raheem Sterling left Stamford Bridge to join Arsenal also on loan at the 11th hour after a frenzied transfer deadline day in the Premier League. The winger Sancho was expected to join the Blues on loan with an obligation to make a permanent move next season for £25 million (\$33 million).

United have cut their losses on the 24-year-old, who has failed to live up to his price tag ever since a £73 million move from Borussia Dortmund in 2021. Sancho has not played a league game for United since posting on social media he had been made a "scapegoat" for poor performances just under a year ago. But he shone during a loan spell back at Dortmund during the second half of last season, helping the German giants reach the Champions League final.

Sancho's arrival adds to Chelsea's bloated squad, but one of those outcast by new boss Enzo Maresca has found a new home as Sterling moved across London to Arsenal. The England international previously worked with Gunners' boss Mikel Arteta during their time at Manchester City. Sterling, who cost Chelsea £50 million from City just two years ago, was one of a number of players urged to find a new club. The 29-year-old gives Arsenal an extra attacking dimension in his bid to become champions for the first time since 2004.

"Looking at everything, I'm just like, 'This is a per-

fect fit for me', and I'm super-happy that we got it over the line," the BBC quoted Sterling as saying after completing a season-long loan move. Chelsea's attempts to agree a deal for Napoli striker Victor Osimhen fell through. Saudi club Al-Ahli had also been interested in the Nigerian but instead signed England international striker Ivan Toney. Brentford have reportedly received a £40 million fee for Toney. "We thank him for so many magic moments and wish him all the best for his next chapter. Ivan leaves as a Brentford legend," said Bees manager Thomas Frank.

Man Utd sign Ugarte

United completed a 50 million euro (£42 million) move for Uruguayan international midfielder Manuel Ugarte from Paris Saint-Germain. "Together we will fight to win trophies and reach the level where this club needs to be," said the 23-year-old. Ugarte becomes the Red Devils' fifth major signing of the window after Leny Yoro, Matthijs de Ligt, Noussair Mazraoui and Joshua Zirkzee. But Erik ten Hag said he was sad to see Scott McTominay go after the Scottish international joined Napoli. Arsenal added goalkeeper Neto as cover for David Raya on a season-long loan from Bournemouth, after letting Aaron Ramsdale leave for Southampton in a £25 million move. Manchester City refused to delve into the market on deadline day even if Pep Guardiola admitted he is taking a

risk in not replacing Argentina striker Julian Alvarez, who departed for Atletico Madrid earlier this month. "Maybe it is a mistake, I don't know but I don't like leaving players without playing for a long time," said Guardiola on his preference for a smaller squad.

Newcastle frustrated

Crystal Palace were among the busiest sides on Friday despite rebuffing interest in captain Marc Guehi from Newcastle. The Eagles signed striker Eddie Nketiah from Arsenal in a deal worth up to £30 million, French defender Maxence Lacroix from Wolfsburg and a loan deal for Chelsea's Trevoh Chalobah. Wolves bolstered their squad with the signings of Brazilian midfielder Andre from Fluminense for £21 million and England goalkeeper Sam Johnstone. Nottingham Forest brought in West Ham midfielder James Ward-Prowse on loan and Brazilian defender Morato from Benfica.

Newcastle have the financial backing of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund but have been frustrated in their attempts to quickly challenge at the top of the Premier League by the need to meet financial sustainability rules. The Magpies were unable to add any major signings during this window. "I don't think the dream dies, necessarily, but I think it takes a lot longer," said Newcastle manager Eddie Howe on his club's bold ambitions of becoming English champions within a decade of the Saudi takeover in 2021. — AFP

Turkey's top Kurdish football club resists hatred, slurs

ISTANBUL: The slurs shouted by the ultras of a football club in northwest Turkey at their Kurdish rivals is just one way that the decades-old feud opposing Turks and Kurds plays out in the sport. While Amedspor is the most popular team among Turkey's Kurds, who make up about a fifth of the country's 85 million people, it is the most hated by the rest of the population. "They are not a team, they are terrorists," said Efe Kaan Ozkaya, a Sakaryaspor fan, standing with friends outside the Istanbul stadium hosting a second-division football match between his club and Amedspor.

Police officers and armored vehicles flooded the Istanbul neighborhood welcoming the southeast Turkish club. As the national anthem played, Sakaryaspor supporters made the salute of the Grey Wolves, a far-right group accused of having killed several Kurdish and left-wing activists. But the game is a precious opportunity for the 200 Amedspor lovers, guarded by 100 police officers, who came to watch their idols — a trip that is frequently banned by authorities over security concerns.

The club's home city of Diyarbakir, also known as Turkey's "Kurdish capital", remains scarred by intense fighting between the army and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 2015-2016. The conflict opposing the government and the PKK — which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union — has killed more than 40,000 people since 1984. Many Kurds say they face significant discrimination in the country. Ankara denies the claims, insisting that it does not discriminate against Kurds as a minority but rather opposes the PKK.

The players sporting white jerseys with red and green stripes — the colors of Kurdistan — began kicking the ball, as fans chanted "Amed! Amed!", Diyarbakir's Kurdish name. Support — and hatred — for the club exploded after 2015, when it changed its name to Amedspor. Nine years later, "the existence of Amedspor, with its colours and its name, is a very strong and unprecedented form of resistance", said Daghlan Irak, a sports sociologist. The Kurds — an ethnic minority who live in mountainous regions spread across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran — have long fought for their own homeland. — AFP



MILAN: Inter Milan's Argentine forward #10 Lautaro Martinez (right) shoots past Atalanta's Italian defender #22 Matteo Ruggeri during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Atalanta at San Siro Stadium in Milan on August 30, 2024. — AFP

Inter Milan hammer Atalanta 4-0 to take charge in Serie A

MILAN: Inter Milan thrashed Atalanta 4-0 on Friday to move provisionally top of Serie A, while Torino snatched a late 1-0 win at Venezia to continue their positive start to the campaign. Italian champions Inter sent a message to any pretenders to their league crown with a dominating performance at a baking hot San Siro. The hosts went in front in the third minute when the unfortunate Berat Djimsiti diverted Marcus Thuram's low cross past his own goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi before Nicolo Barella smashed home a stunning volley seven minutes later.

And Simone Inzaghi's side didn't let up until France forward Thuram completed another powerful individual display with strikes in the 47th and 56th minutes. Federico Dimarco also had a close-range finish ruled out for a tight offside as Atalanta wilted in the face of Inter's attacking onslaught. "We've only

played three matches, it's not a message for anyone. We played very well against a very difficult team. We're happy," said Thuram to DAZN.

Friday's display will be a worry for Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini, whose team came into the season with high hopes after winning the Europa League last season, their first major trophy since 1963. Gasperini was missing a host of players and had to deal with Teun Koopmeiners - who eventually signed for Juventus on Wednesday - and Ademola Lookman agitate for moves away from Bergamo. "The first 10 minutes had a big impact on the morale of the team... I think our season will truly start after the international break," said Gasperini. "Our new players have all arrived in recent weeks so the team still needs to be built."

Atalanta have also lost at Torino, who are level with Inter on seven points after Saul Coco's looping header in the 86th minute secured a dramatic win on the Venice Lagoon. Juventus will retake top spot from Inter if they maintain their perfect start to the campaign by beating Roma on Sunday night. On Saturday Napoli host Parma in high spirits after signing both Romelu Lukaku and Scott McTominay on consecutive days, while AC Milan try to kick-start their campaign at Lazio. — AFP

Lyon's first win of the season comes gift-wrapped

PARIS: Substitute Gift Orban scored twice as Lyon came back from 3-1 down to beat Strasbourg 4-3 in Ligue 1 on Friday and claim their first win of the new season. Lyon had lost their opening two matches of the campaign and so came into this encounter at their Groupama Stadium already under pressure. They fell behind inside three minutes as Swedish international winger Sebastian Nanasi scored his first goal since signing for Strasbourg from Malmö.

Lyon drew level in first-half stoppage time. Corentin Tolisso netting his team's first goal of the campaign after Alexandre Lacazette struck the post. However, Strasbourg scored twice following the restart to lead 3-1 just before the hour mark, with Andrey Santos - the Brazilian on loan from Chelsea - heading in before Emanuel Emegha ran through to find the net. But England international Ainsley Maitland-Niles quickly pulled it back to 3-2 after a Lacazette shot had been tipped onto the bar. Orban, the Nigerian striker, then took centre stage as he turned in a Lacazette cross to level matters again on 64 minutes and headed in a cross from fellow substitute Malick Fofana for the winner on 72 minutes. Lyon secured their first points of the season on a day in which they were trying to raise funds by offloading several players before the transfer window closed. Belgium midfielder Orel Mangala did depart, moving on loan to Everton, who are the subject of a takeover attempt from Lyon's American owner John Textor. — AFP



DECINES-CHARPIEU: Strasbourg's Martiniquan forward #40 Jeremy Sebas looks at the ball during the French L1 football match between Olympique Lyonnais (OL) and Strasbourg (RCSA) at The Groupama Stadium in Decines-Charpieu. - AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707	Qibla	22459381
Rawda	22517733	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Adaliya	22517144	Mirqab	22456536
Khalidiya	24848075	Sharq	22465401
Kaifan	24849807	Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Shamiya	24848913	Sabah Hospital	24812000
Shuwaikh	24814507	Amiri Hospital	22450005
Abdullah Salem	22549134	Maternity Hospital	24843100
Nuzha	22526804	Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764	Chest Hospital	24849400
Qadsiya	22515088	Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Dasmah	22532265	Adan Hospital	23940620
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908	Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Shaab	22518752		

Change of Name

I, Zahra D/o Nadeem Kaiser Abdullah Syed & Shaheen Nadeem, holder of Passport No. V7778233 do hereby change my name to Zahra (as given name) Nadeem Syed (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Zahra Nadeem Syed and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

(#6159, 29/08/2024)

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

REQUIRED

Finance Manager for a New Private Hospital

A newly underdevelopment private hospital in Kuwait is seeking a highly competent Finance Manager.

The successful candidate should possess the following qualifications:

1. University degree in accounting.
2. CPA or CA certification.
3. At least 2 years of working experience in the same position in a private hospital in Kuwait.
4. Excellent analytical capabilities of all business aspects, including financial reporting, business plans, and feasibility studies.
5. Knowledge and competency in dealing with enterprise financial and medical ERP, MIS, and CRM.
6. Ability to handle and deal with contractual matters with vendors, staff, and service providers.
7. General knowledge and acumen regarding medical services of hospitals.
8. High proficiency in using MS Office, presentations, and reporting.
9. Fluent in English and preferably Arabic.
10. Team builder, collaborator, and enjoys effective communication skills.

The selected candidate shall be granted an attractive package and benefits.

Interested candidates may send their CVs to: career.fhg@gmail.com
Your application will be treated with top confidentiality.
Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Arsenal pay price for Rice red card

Aston Villa too good for Leicester



LONDON: Brighton's Cameroonian midfielder #20 Carlos Baleba (2nd left) eyes the ball before jumping for a header next to Arsenal's Dutch defender #12 Jurrien Timber, Arsenal's Brazilian defender #06 Gabriel Magalhaes and Brighton's Argentinean defender #19 Valentin Barco during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Brighton and Hove Albion on August 31, 2024. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal's Premier League title challenge hit its first stumbling block in a 1-1 draw with Brighton after Declan Rice was sent-off on Saturday, while Aston Villa won 2-1 away at Leicester. Both Arsenal and Brighton had maximum points from their opening two games and the Gunners looked set for another victory when Kai Havertz pounced on a Lewis Dunk error to lob in the opening goal. However, the game turned just seconds into the second half when Rice controversially received the first red card of his career.

The England midfielder was deemed to have kicked the ball away as Joel Veltman

shaped up to take a Brighton free-kick and was shown a second yellow card. "I was amazed, amazed, amazed!" an outraged Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said. "Amazed because of how inconsistent decisions can be. "In the first half, there are two incidents and nothing happens. Then, in a non-critical area, the ball hits Declan, he turns around, he doesn't see the player coming and he touches the ball."

Brighton quickly made their man advantage count as Joao Pedro swept home the rebound after David Raya denied Yankuba Minteh. Both sides had chances to win it as Bart Verbruggen denied Havertz and Georginio Rutter headed off

target late on for the visitors. But Arsenal had to settle for a point that could see them cede early ground in the title race. Defending champions Manchester City can go top when the visit West Ham in Saturday's 1630GMT kick-off.

Duran delivers for Villa

Villa bounced back from their defeat to Arsenal last weekend to secure their second win in three games. Amadou Onana stretched to turn in Jacob Ramsey's cross from a well-worked free-kick to open the scoring. Ollie Watkins is yet to find the net this season after helping England to the Euro 2024 final, but his

understudy Jhon Duran has started the campaign in fine form. The Colombian's towering header just two minutes after replacing Watkins gave Villa the breathing space they needed.

Facundo Buonanotte pulled a goal back, but the Foxes remain winless on their return to the Premier League. Southampton have found the jump up to the top flight just as hard. Brentford eased past the Saints 3-1 with Bryan Mbeumo scoring twice. Everton suffered another gut punch on their final season at Goodison Park as Bournemouth came from 2-0 down after 87 minutes to win 3-2. Two quickfire

goals from Michael Keane and Dominic Calvert-Lewin early in the second half had put the Toffees in control.

But Antoine Semenyo gave Bournemouth life before Lewis Cook and Luis Sinisterra ensured Everton remain without a point this season. Ipswich got their first Premier League point in 22 years in a 1-1 draw against Fulham. Liam Delap put the home side in front at Portman Road but Adama Traore secured a draw for Fulham. Honors were also even in a 1-1 draw between Nottingham Forest and Wolves. Manchester United host Liverpool in the blockbuster fixture of the weekend at Old Trafford on Sunday. — AFP



Kuwaiti athletes

Kuwaitis participate in Paralympic Games

PARIS: Kuwait's President of the Paralympic Committee, Mansour Al-Sarhid, assured that the Kuwaiti track and field players are ready to participate in the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. This came in a statement by Sarhid to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the occasion of the Kuwait Disabled Club starting their participation in the

games. Al-Sarhid added that the players trained in camps set up in the UAE before competing, expressing his hope to achieve victories and obtain medals in this international forum to raise Kuwait's name and reputation higher.

He added that the players Faisal Al-Rajhi, Faisal Surour, and Dhari Al-Nassar have high potential to enter into international and worldwide competitions and win, thanks to prior preparations and the continuous support they receive from political leaderships. The Games will run until September 8, featuring athletes from around the world competing in 22 sports. — KUNA

EPL giants slash spending to live within financial rules

MANCHESTER: Premier League clubs' net spend during the transfer window nearly halved as fears of sanctions for breaches of financial sustainability rules resulted in more fiscal discipline. The English top-flight was still able to flex its financial muscle over other top European leagues thanks to the wealthiest broadcast deals in world football. But after Everton and Nottingham Forest were deducted points in the 2023/24 season for overspending, clubs have either been forced into being more cautious or creative to avoid similar penalties.

Overall spend from Premier League clubs broke the £2 billion (\$2.6 billion) mark for the third consecutive season, but dipped significantly from the nearly £2.5 billion 12 months ago with few star names on the market. Tottenham's £65 million deal for Dominic Solanke was the most expensive signing of the window, followed by Manchester United's capture of French teenager Leny Yoro and Pedro Neto's move to Chelsea.

In a bid to balance the books for profit and sustainability rules (PSR), the focus has been on player sales with some controversial consequences. Premier League clubs are limited to losing £105 million (\$138 million) across a three-year assessment period. A number of clubs have ignored fans disquiet to sell players that came through their own academies. The sale of players who came through the youth system is particularly helpful for clubs to comply with financial regulations as the full transfer fee is recorded as a profit in the books.

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag called for changes to the rules after the Red Devils allowed Scott McTominay to leave for Napoli on Friday. "We have to discuss the rules, when you have to sell and obviously homegrown and academy players bring more value, that's not the right thing to do," said Ten Hag.

Newcastle 'dream' delayed

Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca said likewise after Conor Gallagher's move to Atletico Madrid. But the Blues have bucked the trend of financial prudence in another chaotic few months of comings and goings at Stamford Bridge. Chelsea's bloated player pool has expanded to over 50 as the club's American owners continue to bet on hoovering up emerging talent across the globe. Newcastle have felt the restrictive impact of the financial rules more than most. At the time of a takeover by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund three years ago, the Magpies' stated ambition was to win the Premier League within a decade. After a rapid rise and return to the Champions League last season for the first time in 20 years, reality is now hitting.

Newcastle had to sell youngsters Yankuba Minteh and Elliott Anderson before the end of their financial year in June to avoid a breach and have been unable to strengthen as a series of bids for Marc Guehi fell short of Crystal Palace's valuation. "I don't think the dream dies, necessarily, but I think it takes a lot longer," said manager Eddie Howe, whose side finished seventh last season. Newcastle were one of six clubs, also including Liverpool and Manchester City, to bring in more from sales than they spent on new signings. Defending champions City were content to stick largely with what they had despite banking a huge profit from Julian Alvarez's move to Atletico Madrid.

But it was further down the table that the financial advantages of Premier League clubs over other more storied clubs on the continent shone through. Bournemouth were able to splash most of the Solanke fee on Brazilian international Evanilson from Porto. Brighton spent nearly £200 million on eight new signings. All three promoted sides Burnley, Luton and Sheffield United were relegated last year after resisting the temptation to invest their Premier League bounty on the pitch. Newly-promoted Ipswich and Southampton have dished out around £100 million each to try and prevent a repeat this season. — AFP