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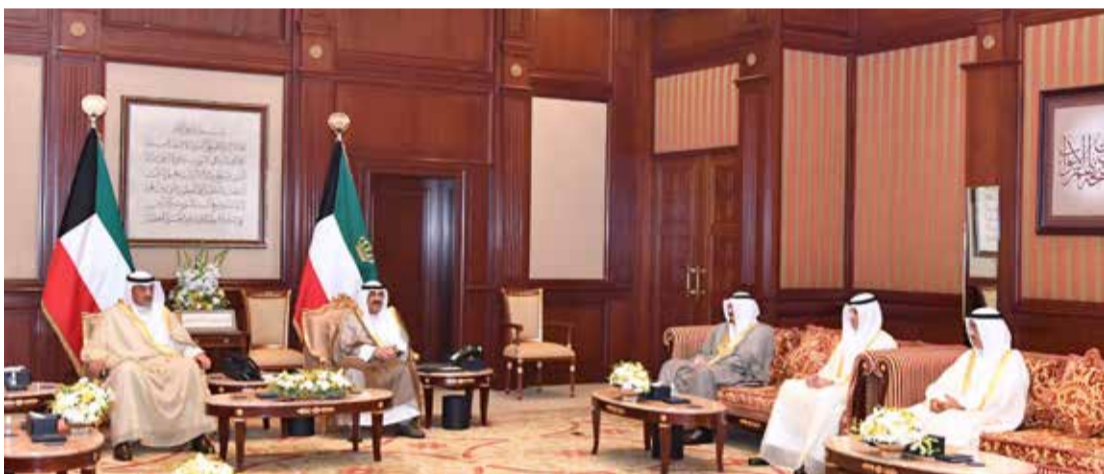
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21st session of Joint Steering Group held as nations mark 125 years of relations

Amir receives info, Saudi ministers



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in the presence of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, received at Bayan Palace on Wednesday HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, who introduced to him newly appointed Minister of Information and Culture and Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, who took the constitutional oath before HH the Amir.

HH the Amir also received Saudi Minister of State and Cabinet Member Prince Turki bin Mohammad Al-Saud. Prince Turki conveyed to HH the Amir the greetings of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as well as their wishes to HH the Amir for good health and wellness and for the Kuwaiti people further progress and prosperity. HH the Amir conveyed his greetings to King Salman and Prince Mohammed, wishing them good health and wellness, and wished the kingdom and its people more progress and prosperity. — KUNA

LONDON: The UK and Kuwait announced on Wednesday new joint funding to help UNICEF deliver lifesaving aid to almost 2.5 million people in Gaza and Yemen. Two memoranda of understanding set out details of the funding, which will go towards UNICEF's efforts to restore water supply and sanitation systems in Gaza and sustain primary healthcare services in Yemen. The UK and Kuwait will provide \$6 million of joint support (\$3 million each), to UNICEF, whose work is expected to benefit approximately 1,000,000 people in Gaza and 1,450,000 in Yemen.

Minister for the Middle East Hamish Falconer said: "Conflict has aggravated the humanitarian crises in Gaza and Yemen and the UK is committed to pushing for more lifesaving aid to reach those in desperate need. The UK and Kuwait's joint funding towards UNICEF's lifesaving work in Gaza and Yemen demonstrates our shared commitment to tackle some of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. I am proud of the UK and Kuwait's close ties, which have now endured for more than 125 years and continue to go from strength to strength."

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LONDON: UK Minister for the Middle East Hamish Falconer and Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah meet on Sept 4, 2024.

975,000 still to submit biometrics as deadlines near

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Director of the Personal Investigation Department at the Criminal Investigations Directorate Brig Gen Nayef Al-Mutairi announced that approximately 800,000 Kuwaitis have completed their biometric registration, leaving around 175,000 citizens who are still required to do so. For residents,

the number stands at about 1,068,000, with approximately 800,000 residents remaining.

He further stated that the process has been progressing smoothly, with the ministry of interior set to introduce additional measures to facilitate the remaining registrations. This follows the directives of First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, aimed at ensuring the process is as seamless as possible.

Mutairi reiterated that the deadline for citizens to complete their biometric registration is Sept 30, while residents have until Dec 31, confirming these deadlines have not changed. He also emphasized that all transactions will be suspended for those who have not completed their biometric registration by the respective deadlines, as announced earlier this year.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kuwait stands with Egypt

KUWAIT: Kuwait's foreign ministry expressed solidarity with Egypt and condemned remarks by the Zionist prime minister, accusing him of trying to distract from crimes committed by Zionist forces against Palestinians. The ministry said the Zionist entity is attempting to undermine mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the US to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza. — KUNA

Saudi scraps hotel license fees

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia decided on Wednesday to cancel fees for issuing commercial activity licenses for hotels, hotel apartments and residential resorts in the kingdom, state news agency SPA reported. It added the initiative would encourage investors to put more money into the tourism sector, which would increase the industry's contribution to GDP. — Reuters

Thunberg arrested at demo

COPENHAGEN: Climate activist Greta Thunberg, wearing a keffiyeh, and several others were arrested Wednesday after occupying a University of Copenhagen building to call for an academic boycott of Zionist universities, Danish media reported. Thunberg has increasingly taken up the Palestinian cause and said in May such protests "should be everywhere". — AFP

Sisi, Erdogan meet to mend frayed ties

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi discussed the Gaza war and ways to further repair the long-frozen ties between the regional powers during talks in Ankara, in the first such presidential visit in 12 years. Relations between Ankara and Cairo collapsed in 2013 after Egypt's then-army chief Sisi led the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, a Turkish ally who had become Egypt's first democratically elected president the year before.

Ties between the two countries began thawing in 2020 when Ankara launched a diplomatic drive to ease tensions with its estranged regional rivals,

including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Last year, Ankara and Cairo mutually reappointed ambassadors and Turkey said it would also provide Cairo with armed drones. Erdogan traveled to Cairo in February for his first trip to Egypt since 2012.

He met Sisi at Ankara airport on Wednesday and the two then traveled in the same car to the presidential palace for around two hours of talks. "With a win-win mindset, we will carry our multi-dimensional ties forward," Erdogan said, adding Ankara particularly wanted to deepen ties with Egypt on natural gas and nuclear energy. Ministers from the two countries signed 18 memoranda of understanding on cooperation in energy, defense, tourism, health, agriculture, finance, culture, education and transport.

Despite the decade of estrangement, trade between the two countries never ceased: Turkey is Egypt's fifth-largest trading partner, while Egypt is Turkey's largest in Africa. — AFP



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi at the Presidential Complex on Sept 4, 2024. — AFP

Digital pause: School mobile ban in France

PARIS: Tens of thousands of pupils in France are going through a slightly different return to school this autumn, deprived of their mobile phones. At 180 "colleges", the middle schools French children attend between the ages of 11 and 15, a scheme is being trialled to ban the use of mobile phones during the entire school day.

The trial of the "pause numerique" ("digital pause"), which encompasses more than 50,000 pupils, is being implemented ahead of a possible plan to enforce it nationwide from 2025. Right

now, pupils in French middle schools must turn off their phones. The experiment takes things further, requiring children to hand in their phones on arrival. It is part of a move by President Emmanuel Macron for children to spend less time in front of screens, which the government fears is arresting their development.

The use of "a mobile phone or any other electronic communications terminal equipment" has been banned in nurseries, elementary schools and middle schools in France since 2018. In high schools, which French children attend between the ages of 15 and 18, internal regulations may prohibit the use of a cell phone by pupils in "all or part of the premises."

Bruno Bobkiewicz, general secretary of SNPDEN-Unsa, France's top union of school principals, said the 2018 law had been enforced

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QUIMPER, France: Children attend class on the first day of the new school year on Sept 2, 2024. — AFP



UAE, Kuwait boost fraternal relations

ABU DHABI: UAE's President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan held on Wednesday talks with Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah on the brotherly historic bonds between the two countries, UAE's news agency (WAM) reported. President Mohammad bin Zayed received Sheikh Fahad at Qasr Al Shati in Abu Dhabi, where he conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the UAE's leader, along with his best wishes for the UAE's continued progress and prosperity.

In return, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed extended his greetings and best wishes to His Highness the Amir, wishing further progress and prosperity for Kuwait's people under his leadership. During the meeting, the

two sides also focused on the long-standing fraternal ties between the UAE and Kuwait and the progress in their collaboration in various fields that serve the two countries' interests and meet their shared aspirations for development and prosperity, it added. The meeting further stressed the importance of supporting Gulf Cooperation Council efforts to serve the common interests of GCC countries and their peoples and contribute to enhancing regional security, stability, and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by Lt Gen Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior; Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan; Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs; Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence; Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon Al-Nahyan, Advisor for Special Affairs at the Presidential Court; Mohamed Mubarak Fadel Al-Mazrouei, Minister of State for Defense Affairs; Ahmed Juma Al-Zaabi, Adviser to the UAE President; along with a number of officials and the delegation accompanying Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah. — KUNA



UAE's President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan receives Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



UAE Vice President Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed discusses fraternal bilateral relations with Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al Yousef. — KUNA photos

Zain Alshuhoor campaign recognized as distinguished Social Project in Kuwait

Regional recognition reflects Zain's efforts to implement its social sustainability



Social Affairs Minister Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah honors Faisal Al-Duwaihees, attended by GCC Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi and Qatar's Social Development Minister Mariam Al-Misnad. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Zain has been recognized with the Distinguished Social Project honor in Kuwait's private sector for its annual Ramadan campaign, Zain Alshuhoor. The recognition came during the recent tenth meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' Ministers of Social Affairs held in Doha, Qatar. The announcement was made during the thirteenth honoring ceremony for recognizing leading community projects, attended by the GCC Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi, Minister of Social Affairs and Family & Children Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, and Qatar's Minister of Social Development and Family Mariam Al-Misnad. Zain Kuwait's Corporate Relations Specialist Faisal Al-Duwaihees received the recognition.

This honor underscores Zain's commitment to implementing its comprehensive corporate social responsibility and sustainability strategy to drive impactful social contributions. It also reflects the company's ongoing efforts to foster collaboration with public and private sector organizations to create a positive impact within the community, especial-

ly during the Holy Month of Ramadan, which embodies values of generosity, goodwill, and sharing.

Zain expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council for this regional recognition, considering it a testament to the Kuwaiti private sector's commitment to achieving social development goals, fostering community outreach, and advancing sustainable objectives — goals that the company has successfully achieved through its Zain Alshuhoor campaign. The campaign is one of the first and largest Ramadan community campaigns in Kuwait. Launched over a decade ago, it kicks off annually before the start of the Holy Month and continues daily until Eid holidays. The campaign offers a wide and ever-evolving range of volunteer, charitable, humanitarian, social, spiritual, and sports programs throughout the month.

Through this campaign, Zain strives to reinforce the values of generosity and kindness that the Holy Month embodies, renewing its connection with all segments of society through numerous initiatives and contributions that reflect the deep-rooted values of



the Kuwaiti community in helping others and promoting such values. This year, Zain collaborated with several strategic partners from both the public and private sectors in Kuwait, including the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Grand Mosque of Kuwait, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Kuwait Food Bank, the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs, and Suffix, a sports events and activities organization.

The campaign featured tens of initiatives, including distributing food baskets, hosting iftar meals, organizing humanitarian and social visits to care homes, children's hospitals, and centers for people with disabilities, in addition to health & sports activities, entertainment and social events, Quran recitation competitions, participations in popular media programs, and much more. The campaign achieved positive results this year, including the distribution of 42,000 iftar meals throughout the Holy Month and nearly 1,000 food baskets to underprivileged families through three official entities. Zain also contributed KD 500,000 to the national campaign to aid debtors in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs.



Additionally, more than 800 participants took part in Zain Alshaheed Park Ramadan Challenge, while hundreds participated in the company's first Holy Quran recitation competition in collaboration with the Grand Mosque. Hundreds of families also visited Zain's headquarters to participate in the second season of the unique Zain Girgeaan Drive-Thru event, along with presenting numerous prizes through television and radio programs. Zain believes that its success in serving the community is largely due to its strong strategic partnerships with various government and civil society organizations, non-profit entities, international organizations, public and private sector institutions, and volunteer groups — partnerships that have resulted in a positive social impact year after year.

GCC-EU Summit will cap strategic relations

RIYADH: Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Najib Al-Bader said that the forthcoming GCC-European Summit, due in Brussels, would cap the bilateral strategic relations. The unprecedented upcoming summit will be a historic turning point in Gulf-European relations as it will depict the two sides' adherence to establish a full-fledged partnership on the basis of mutual respect and confidence, said Ambassador Al-Bader in a statement to KUNA as he emerged from the 32nd meeting of the GCC-European Cooperation Committee's meeting.

He revealed that the commission's meeting addressed preparations for the summit, due in October 2024. The

distinctive ties between the GCC and the EU are not merely conventional relations; as they rise to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership, designed to establish a common future based on mutual interests and common values, he said, affirming that these relations would continue to grow amid the close cooperation between the two blocs.

The GCC-European relations have been substantially developing, he said, adding that the participants in today's meeting tackled the achievements and the challenges and means of boosting the mutual cooperation further at strategic levels, alluding to the aspiration to broaden the cooperation in the fields of security, economy, commerce, investment, communication, energy, digital transformation, cyber security, education, and scientific research.

Moreover, the meeting addressed regional and international developments that warrant coordination and the bolstering of cooperation for the sake of attaining security and stability in the region. The GCC, founded in the early 80s of the past century, groups Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain. — KUNA



The 32nd Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting of the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council. — KUNA photos



A group photo of the Gulf-European Committee's consensus at the Cooperation Council's headquarters in Riyadh. — KUNA photos



Meeting of the Arab Economic and Social Council. — KUNA

Arab League calls to mitigate economic, social impacts on Gaza

CAIRO: The Arab League called on Wednesday for its Economic and Social Council to develop plans and programs in cooperation with the League's agencies and partners to mitigate as much as possible the Zionist occupation aggression's economic and social impacts on Gaza, with a future vision of normalcy. This came in the opening speech by the League's Assistant Secretary-General Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh during the 114th session of the League's Economic and Social Council (chaired by the UAE) to prepare for the Council's ministerial meeting on Thursday.

Abu Ghazaleh said that the current Council session is held amid "unprecedented exceptional circumstances" facing the Arab region due to the continued occupation aggression practices in Palestine, southern Lebanon, and some areas in Arab countries. The brutal aggression has become the foundation of social, humanitarian, and economic tragedy witnessed by many Arab countries as the Zionists disregarded all international legitimacy resolutions," she added.

Abu Ghazaleh explained that the difficult social and humanitarian conditions resulting from this aggression have destroyed the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, displaced families and children, and the number of martyrs and injured is increasing around the clock. In this regard, she pointed to the Palestinian Ministry of Health's announcement of the risen number of martyrs that reached

40,819 deaths and the injured to 94,291 since October 7 in a tragedy — the first of its kind in history.

She stressed the importance of focusing on ensuring a decent life for Arab citizens within a framework of social justice and by strengthening Arab efforts aimed at implementing Arab and international resolutions and charters related to sustainable economic and social development. Assistant Undersecretary for International Trade Affairs at the UAE Ministry of Economy, Jumaa Al Kait, stressed in his speech the importance of strengthening joint Arab action in the economic field and developing policies that serve the shared economy as well as Arab countries.

Al-Kait said that the Council's meeting will discuss several matters, including following up on implementing decisions of the previous session, reviewing the latest developments in Arab work, the Arab Free Trade Area, and the Arab Customs Union, activating investments between Arab countries, and joint Arab work. For her part, Secretary-General of the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply Dana Al-Zoubi said in her speech that this is the second session of the Economic and Social Council to be held in light of the brutal aggression on Palestine.

Al-Zoubi stressed the importance of joint Arab action to face the challenges "that no longer exclude anyone" as the Arab region is affected by regional instability and the need to follow a "collective approach" in work as the individual approach will not suffice to avoid economic crises. She called for activating the Arab Free Trade Area and Customs Union, expressing hope for increasing the rate of inter-Arab trade and enhancing Arab cooperation and investments. The Kuwaiti delegation to the meeting is chaired by Acting Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance for Economic Affairs Talal Al-Namash. — KUNA

Amir receives Crown Prince, PM and Information Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, received at Bayan Palace on Wednesday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who introduced the newly appointed Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Badah Al-Mutairi. The new minister took the constitutional oath before His Highness the Amir. The ceremony was attended by state senior officials. — KUNA

Rate of GCC women economic participation hits 43.2 percent

10th GCC meeting for Social Affairs and Development launched in Qatar



Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Labor, Family Affairs and Childhood and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah and Qatari Minister of Social Development and Family Mariam Al-Misnad sign the MoUs. — KUNA photos



Ministers and officials take a group photo.



Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs with the Saudi Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

DOHA: The 10th ministerial meeting of the Committee of GCC Ministers of Social Affairs and Development was held on Wednesday in the Qatari capital, Doha, with the participation of the Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah. The Qatari Minister of Social Development and Family, Maryam Al-Misnad, highlighted the importance of the meeting in a speech, saying it carries the aspirations and hopes of our people in social development in accordance with a comprehensive vision for a Gulf society united with its identity and sustainable morals and values.

She added that the adoption of the GCC social development strategy of 2021-2025 represents a major step within our joint efforts to bring about social development for our people and the implementation of the initiatives within them. She expressed her aspiration for the meeting to adopt policies that support cohesion and stability in Gulf society and strengthen the Arab and Islamic spirit, identity, and cooperation among the Gulf States.

The minister pointed out that Qatar puts great importance on supporting pioneering community projects that also empower productive families and enhance community awareness of family cohesion and building families based on the Islamic religion. She assured that Qatar will keep supporting these projects on a national and international level, welcoming recommendations on building development partnerships between sectors in which innovation is used to advance GCC society.

Al-Misnad added that her country is stressing more cooperation to implement the committee's pre-



Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah is pictured during the meeting.

vious decision on the strategy of joint Gulf action for women's affairs in the GCC countries 2024-2030 and follow up on what has been achieved to enhance the role of motherhood in society and achieve harmony between the roles of men and women. She welcomed the attendance of the International Conference on Family to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which will be hosted by Qatar from 29 to 31 October, 2024, looking forward to hosting the seventh Gulf Theater Festival for Persons with Disabilities from November 27 to December 3 in Qatar.

On his part, the GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi said that the continued joint work in social development has seen great achievements in the past years under the leadership of founding

and current GCC leaders. He pointed out that one of the achievements is supporting and empowering Gulf women's affairs and role in economic development programs in joint GCC work. He added that the rate of women's economic participation in the GCC countries has increased, reaching 43.2 percent, and the percentage of senior positions in the government sector for women has reached 49 percent.

As for the percentage of senior management positions in the private sector, it has reached 30.9 percent, and the percentage of female workers in the government sector has reached 43.4 percent, while in the private sector it reached 38.2 percent. Al-Budaiwi added. These statistics embody the support given by leaders of the GCC countries to Gulf women to enhance their positions regionally and globally, pointing to the keenness of the leaders to support the process of joint charitable work and to improve the level of services provided in the field, he stated.

He pointed out that the GCC countries provide \$210 billion annually for charitable works in all parts of the world, which is a source of pride for us as Gulf people, as we have helped and provided to everyone who needs it without favor or condition. He added that a number of topics in the fields of social affairs and development were presented on the agenda in the meeting to come up with recommendations for the topics on the agenda, foremost of which is the social development strategy of the GCC countries and the strategy of joint charitable and humanitarian work in the GCC countries (2025-2030).

On the agenda is the strategy of joint Gulf action for women's affairs in the GCC (2025-2030) and the seventh Gulf theater festival for persons with

disabilities, he mentioned. The Secretary-General welcomed the Minister of Social Affairs, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, in regards to her first participation in the meetings, wishing her success. The delegation of Kuwait was headed by the Minister of Social Affairs, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah.

Kuwait signs MoUs

Meanwhile, Kuwait signed on Wednesday three memoranda of understanding (MoU) in fields of social affairs, charity, and humanitarian work with Qatar and Saudi Arabia in the Qatari capital Doha. Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Labor, Family Affairs, and Childhood, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, Qatari Minister of Social Development and Family Mariam Al-Misnad, and the Saudi Minister of Human Resources and Social Development signed the MoUs.

Al-Huwailah expressed to KUNA her happiness on the signing of the three MoUs, which contributes to strengthening the relations of GCC countries in the social, charity, and humanitarian fields. She also thanked Qatar for hosting the 10th meeting of the GCC Ministers of Social Development Affairs Committee and the MoU signing.

Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah said on Wednesday that Kuwait will host the next meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Social Affairs and Development in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in September next year. Dr Al-Huwailah stressed the importance of participating in this meeting, explaining that it discussed a number of topics, including the social development strategy for the GCC countries. — KUNA

Minors receive essential support as new school year begins

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The General Authority for Minors' Affairs held a "Back to School" event on Wednesday at The Avenues mall, reflecting its commitment to supporting the mental, academic, and financial needs of children under its care. In an interview with Kuwait Times during the event, Hamad Al-Barjas, Director of the Authority, shared that preparations for the back-to-school season are a yearly effort that they are keen on keeping alive. Aside from the entertainment activities, he said that they provide financial assistance to families in need, helping them purchase their children's school supplies.

He added that the Authority maintains

regular contact with the children's schools, offering academic support to those struggling with learning difficulties by closely monitoring their progress throughout the year. Al-Barjas described the event as both educational and entertaining, designed to equip children with the skills necessary to succeed in the upcoming academic semester. He noted that the Authority constantly evaluates and develops its programs to meet the evolving needs of the children in their care.

Tamader Al-Omar, Director of the Social and Educational care Department at the Authority, noted that this year's event brought added value compared to previous years. With an increased focus on the children's mental health, Consultant Psychiatrist Dr.



Kawther Al-Yakout was invited to provide psychological consultations for those experiencing anxiety about the new school year. Additionally, gifts were distributed, and financial support was directly deposited into the bank accounts of families in need on the day of the event.

Dr Al-Yakout, along with Dr Bedour Al-Mutairi who work at the Social and Educational Department at the Authority, will continue to support children throughout the academic semester, addressing issues such as learning delays or difficulties, said Al-Omar. She also mentioned that the Authority's outreach extends beyond school's field trips, as they visit the children's homes, encouraging their families, especially mothers, to participate in further educational courses. By the end of this month, Al-Omar announced that the Authority will host a special ceremony at one of the country's prominent hotels to honor last year's outstanding students, as a gesture of their encouragement of hardworking students.



Children and their families enjoy their time during the 'back to school' event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat





Kuwait's 12th air bridge flight departs to Sudan

KUWAIT: Kuwait's 12th relief aid plane departed for Sudan on Wednesday, carrying on board 36 tons of food, medicine, and two ambulances, organized by the Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) to help those affected by the war and floods. Before takeoff, the General Manager of the Society, Abdulaziz Al-Obaid, told KUNA that this aid plane is part of Kuwait's air bridge to help Sudan with the support of Zakat House in cooperation with Ministries of Defense, Social Affairs, and Foreign Affairs, as well as other eight charities. The shipment consists of two ambulances, 10 tons of shelter tents, and 20 tons of necessary food.

In Sudan, the heavy rains and the flood that left hundreds of Sudanese deceased and injured, as well as thousands displaced, were the key motive for Kuwaiti charities to continue this relief mission and to ease the pain and suffering of the Sudanese people. On his part, the Director General of Kuwait Zakat House, Dr Majed Al-Azmi, affirmed that the Kuwaiti Air Bridge is to help and support the people of Sudan in this humanitarian crisis. Dr Al-Azmi praised the Kuwaiti political leadership for the rapid response to the people of Sudan, with all charities and ministries having provided them with tremendous assistance in the past 16 months. — KUNA



Burgan Bank and Free Jabriya bring back Miami Band's 'Feykom Tarab? Sukkar Zeyada!' to life

Confirming bank's unwavering commitment to the advancement of arts and culture

KUWAIT: Expanding on the massive success and wide public acclaim of "Feykom Tarab?, A Night with Miami", which presented audiences with a uniquely immersive and multi-sensory musical experience, Burgan Bank announced the sponsorship of a bigger and more extravagant Free Jabriya Production: "Feykom Tarab? Sukkar Zeyada!", featuring the cross-generational favorite, Miami Band.

The elaborate performance is scheduled to take place for five nights between September 19 and 23 at The Arena Kuwait. The sponsorship marks a new milestone in Burgan Bank's ongoing partnership with Free Jabriya Productions, which has yielded numerous successful shows, and comes as part of the Bank's comprehensive social responsibility strategy and dedicated arts and culture development program in Kuwait.

The new musical extravaganza, co-directed by Maryam Al-Khatrash and Jassem Al-Qames and produced by Free Jabriya co-founder Ali Al-Nusif, promises audiences a visually engaging musical journey like no other. The show offers a rich blend of new songs, gripping performances, colorful designs, dashing costumes, and an altogether more immersive entertainment experience that incorporates the latest audio-visual technologies alongside a bigger crew of local top talents and calibers and international experts in the live entertainment industry.

"We are delighted to partner with and extend our support for Free Jabriya on their latest live production, 'Feykom Tarab? Sukkar Zeyada!', which follows the unmatched success of the previous performance, 'Feykom Tarab?, A Night with Miami', in addition to a series of successful collaborations over the past two years," said Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank.

"This year's performance is truly special because it rests on the genuine skills and dedicated efforts of youthful local talents who have exhibited prime professionalism on every front to present a creative show that befits the history and fanbase of Miami Band, as well as rises to the high standards of the Free Jabriya productions and the events that Burgan Bank sponsors."

"Our steadfast support for young Kuwaiti talents is integral to Burgan Bank's strategy, our social responsibility program, and our commitment to achieving sustainable development. Through our sponsorship of world-class performances, we aim to contribute to the advancement of Kuwait's art and entertainment industry and attract art enthusiasts from all over the world," she added.

Meanwhile, Hamad Haji, Executive Manager – Products and Segments at Burgan Bank, said: "Through our sponsorship of artistic and entertainment events, we are delighted to attract one of society's biggest and most impactful segments, the youth. Our role as sponsors of 'Feykom Tarab? Sukkar Zeyada!' is a testament to our commitment to maintaining direct communication with the youth wherever they are and catering to their taste.

Exclusively for our Youth account customers, we have prepared several surprises and social media competitions to win free tickets to the upcoming Miami Band performance, in addition to many fun on-ground activities that will be taking place during the five nights of the show. The Youth account also offers many benefits, including a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring educational allow-



ance, a referral program, exclusive offers and discounts, and an annual draw to win a car."

"Burgan Bank is committed to offering the youth the best financial tools that enable them to manage their finances wisely and responsibly at a young age. The account centers on youths' advanced needs and modern lifestyles, confirming our commitment toward this special segment," Haji added. "In line with the 'Let's Be Aware' (Diraya) campaign, advancing the Youth account aims to reinforce financial literacy, boost banking awareness, and encourage the adoption of the saving culture among Kuwaiti teenagers and young adults."

Ali Al-Nusif, Executive Producer and Co-Founder – Free Jabriya, stated that producing the second Miami show was greatly influenced by the grand success of the first volume of "Feykom Tarab?", which introduced a new entertainment formula to the Kuwaiti audience, whereby sing-

ing, choreography, and audio-visual technology entwined into a momentous live performance. "We wanted this show to really bring the essence of Miami Band through the different acts that come together as elaborate paintings, each taking the audience on a colorful journey that picks up where the previous show left off," Al-Nusif added.

Burgan Bank's partnership with Free Jabriya Productions has yielded many valuable works of art that raised the bar of live performances in Kuwait and were met with wide public acclaim and enthusiasm. These collaborations include "Feykom Tarab?, A Night with Miami, Graish, and Macintosh". As part of its dynamic social responsibility program, Burgan Bank continues to create and sponsor new spaces where national talents can thrive and shine, preserving the Kuwaiti culture and allowing more generations to connect with the country's authentic identity.



Storytelling: Effective communication tool

SHARJAH: Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr Fatima Al-Salem, stressed on Wednesday the importance of storytelling in government media as an effective communication tool between state agencies, institutions, and the public, and a media style that keeps pace with social media tools and technological development. This came during Dr Al-Salem's participation in a dialogue session organized by the Sharjah Press Club entitled "Storytelling: Human Communication in the Age of Digitization" within the activities of the 13th International Government Communication Forum held in Sharjah for two days.

Dr Al-Salem said during the session, which was also attended by Saudi writer and editor-in-chief of Al-Riyadh newspaper Nawal Al-Jaber, Bahraini journalist and writer Susan Al-Shaer, and moderated by Kuwaiti media figure Dr Mohammad Al-Wasmi, that the importance of storytelling lies in providing information related to the institution in an attractive, simple, and visually dazzling manner, with the attachment of pictures, videos, charts, or illustrations to be embedded in the public's memory faster and easier than data.

She added that storytelling provides a comprehensive explanation of government initiatives and projects in a more convincing way for the public and increases their interaction with government agencies and institutions, indicating that Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) has experience in storytelling through the 'Professional Diaries' program. She explained that storytelling addresses all segments of society

and takes into account educational and cultural differences between individuals.

It also meets the needs of public opinion to know the news and activities that are related to government agencies and institutions and is likely to enhance citizens' confidence in government media. Regarding the challenges facing governments in applying storytelling in digital media, Dr. Al-Salem stated that they lie in the lack of sufficient journalistic and media cadres to pump daily materials in this style and the lack of expertise, in addition to its novelty in government media and the reliance on the traditional method of publishing data and information.

Dr Al-Salem stressed that social media has proven the success of storytelling and has received wide acceptance, in addition to the success of marketing campaigns through this method, which is an effective means of influence and interaction. She said that technological development has made the media witness leaps outside the traditional formats of news and information dissemination through the integration of visual, audio, and print and has resulted in providing more widespread and influential content, stressing that spreading the government narrative using hybrid media will be correct, more effective, and beneficial.

For her part, Saudi writer and editor-in-chief of Al-Riyadh newspaper, Nawal Al-Jaber, stressed the importance of storytelling in enhancing communication, building identity, conveying the message effectively, and enhancing trust and interaction between the public and institutions. Al-Jaber said that introducing storytelling and making it a basic means of communication between the public and institutions is a community culture and a successful means of achieving more accomplishments. — KUNA



Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Dr Fatima Al-Salem participates in the dialogue session. —



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Grenfell Tower inferno 'culmination of decades of failure': UK inquiry

Seeking re-election, Algeria's Tebboune touts achievements

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DOUZROU: A man sits amid the rubble in the earthquake-hit village of Douzrou, in central Morocco on February 13, 2024. — AFP photos

Morocco slowly rebuilds a year after earthquake

Villagers still living in tents, unable to escape the trauma

TINISKT, Morocco: For the past year Kebira Ait Bellaïd has been living in a tent in a mountain village in Morocco, haunted by the memory of losing her daughter and three grandchildren. "I can still hear my nine-year-old grandson's screams under the rubble," the 52-year-old said, recalling the September 8 earthquake that devastated the area. "This earthquake has changed me forever," she told AFP.

The 6.8-magnitude quake killed nearly 3,000 people and damaged the homes of over two million people across the High Atlas region. In Tiniskt, a village perched in the mountains about 70 kilometers (45 miles) southwest of Marrakesh, 45 people lost their lives.

Of the roughly 500 villagers who remain, many are still living in tents, unable to escape the trauma. Tears welling in her eyes, Khadija Id Yassine said she was trying to forget about the quake but "it remains anchored" in her mind. "Life has been hard in the tent, between the freezing cold of winter and the stifling heat of summer," said Yassine, a mother of three whose house is still awaiting reconstruction. While most debris has been cleared, the village still bears signs of destruction. Only the mosque and three houses, built with concrete, remain standing.

'Turn this painful page'

The government has provided most families in Tiniskt with an initial payout of 20,000 Moroccan dirhams (around \$2,000). But no houses have been rebuilt. Al-Haouz province, which includes Tiniskt, was the worst affected area, with about 24,000 houses slated for reconstruction — but only around 1,000 have been rebuilt.

Amine Bouih of Al-Omrane public construction agency said it was still tricky to access damaged areas in mountainous terrain. Ambulance driver Brahim Ait Ouarah, from the village of Ouirgane near Tiniskt, said he paid out of his own pocket to rebuild his home, only getting state aid later. "The six months I spent in a tent were very

difficult," said Ouarah, who lost his wife and son in the quake. "I was eager to turn this painful page, even when nothing can compensate for the lost lives."

'Big mistake'

Locals are not only frustrated with the slow pace of rehousing, but also with how the new homes are being built. Concrete is being widely used in Tiniskt and other villages, rather than traditional building materials like clay and stone. Architect Khalil Morad El Gilali thinks this is "a big mistake". "It is expensive, not suitable for this environment and not reliable," he said. Gilali has been involved in the reconstruction of 70 houses using the traditional clay and stone of the villages, turning down projects that use concrete. He argues that the authorities, in their rush to rebuild, have shown "a lack of vision". But Al Omrane's Bouih said traditional architecture takes more time — a luxury in short supply when people desperately need shelter. — AFP



TINISKT: A woman walks among temporary housing structures in Douar Tiniskt, in the el-Haouz province in the High Atlas Mountains south of Marrakesh, on August 27, 2024, almost a year after a devastating 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country.



JABALIA CAMP: Members of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music sing during a summer camp for children called "Peace for Gaza", at the Jabalia camp for displaced Palestinians in northern Gaza. — AFP

Gazan teen musician sings for children who endure horrors of war

GAZA: Braving the constant threat of airstrikes and bombings, 15-year-old Youssef Saad, a Gazan oud player, rides his bicycle through the war-ravaged streets of northern Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, his instrument strapped to his back. Saad sings for children who have endured daily horrors in 11 months of war, trying to offer them a little joy or distraction. "The homes in my city were once full of dreams," Saad said, gazing at the rubble of the decades-old urban refugee camp, which before the war was built-up and heavily populated. "Now, they're gone," he says.

Saad was studying at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in nearby Gaza City before it was reduced to ruins in the war that's devastated

much of the enclave. Now, living with relatives after his own home was destroyed, he is one of five siblings whose futures have been upended.

His father, a government employee with the Palestinian Authority, always supported Saad's dream of becoming a musician. But now, Saad's focus has shifted. He spends his days at a Jabalia day center, playing his oud and singing for children traumatized by war.

"Every house holds a tragedy," Saad said. "Some have lost their mother, others their father, their neighbor, or their friend." Despite the danger, Saad is determined to continue his mission. "We try to help improve their mental health, even if it means putting myself at risk," he said. "This is my duty to the children." And he refuses to give up on his dreams for the future: "We, the children of Palestine, strive to stay resilient, even in the face of genocide." Saad says he lives by a saying that carries him through the darkest days: "If you live, live free, or die standing like trees." — Reuters

Boycotts over Gaza lift Muslim countries' local soda drinks

KARACHI/CAIRO/NEW YORK: Coca-Cola and rival PepsiCo spent hundreds of millions of dollars over decades building demand for their soft drinks in Muslim-majority countries including Egypt to Pakistan. Now, both face a challenge from local sodas in those countries due to consumer boycotts that target the globe-straddling brands as symbols of America, and by extension the Zionist entity, at a time of war in Gaza.

In Egypt, sales of Coke have cratered this year, while local brand V7 exported three times as many bottles of its own cola in the Middle East and the wider region than last year. In Bangladesh, an outcry forced Coca-Cola to cancel an ad campaign against the boycott. And across the Middle East, Pepsi's rapid growth evaporated after the Gaza war started in October.

Pakistani corporate executive Sunbal Hassan kept Coke and Pepsi off her wedding menu in Karachi in April. She said she didn't want to feel her money had reached the tax coffers of the United States, the entity's staunchest ally. "With the boycott, one can play a part by not contributing to those funds," Hassan said. Instead, she served her wedding guests Pakistani brand Cola Next.

She is not alone. While market analysts say it is hard to put a dollar figure on lost sales and PepsiCo and Coca-Cola still have growing businesses in several countries in the Middle East, Western beverage brands suffered a 7 percent sales decline in the first half of the year across the region, market researcher NielsenIQ says.

Consumer boycotts date back at least as far as an 18th century anti-slavery sugar protest in Britain. The strategy was used in the 20th century to fight apartheid in South Africa and has been widely wielded

against the Zionist entity through the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Many consumers shunning Coca-Cola and PepsiCo cite US support of the entity over decades, including in the current war in Gaza. "Some consumers are deciding to make different options in their purchases because of the political perception," PepsiCo CEO Ramon Laguarta told Reuters in a July 11 interview, adding that boycotts are "impacting those particular geographies" such as Lebanon, Pakistan and Egypt. "We will manage through it over time," he said. "It's not meaningful to our top line and bottom line at this point."

PepsiCo's total revenue from its Africa, Middle East and South Asia division was \$6 billion in 2023, earnings releases show. The same year, Coca-Cola's revenue from its Europe, Middle East and Africa region was \$8 billion, company filings show. In the six months following the war, PepsiCo beverage volumes in the Africa, Middle East and South Asia division barely grew, after notching up 8 percent and 15 percent growth in the same quarters of 2022/23, the company said.

In response to a Reuters request, PepsiCo said neither the company "nor any of our brands are affiliated with any government or military in the conflict." Coca-Cola has said it does not fund military operations in the Zionist entity or any country. Palestinian-American businessman Zahi Khouri founded Ramallah-based Coca-Cola bottler National Beverage Company, which sells Coke in the West Bank. The company's \$25 million plant in Gaza, opened in 2016, has been destroyed in the war, he said. Employees were unharmed, he said.

Khouri said boycotts were a matter of personal choice but didn't really help Palestinians. In the West Bank itself, he said, they had limited sales impact. "Only ending the occupation would help the situation," said Khouri, who supports the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the Zionist entity.

The big soda companies are no stranger to pressure among the Muslim world's hundreds of millions of consumers. After Coke opened a factory in the Zionist entity in the 1960s, it was hit by an Arab League boycott that lasted until the early 1990s and benefited Pepsi for years in the Middle East. — Reuters

International

Grenfell Tower inferno 'culmination of decades of failure': UK inquiry

Government, construction industry, firms all responsible for 'avoidable' deaths, inquiry finds



LONDON: Menana Jabari (left) a relative of the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire disaster looks at a wall displaying pictures of the 72 people killed by the blaze on September 4, 2024. — AFP photos



Fire engulfs Grenfell Tower in this file photo.

No peace without justice for Grenfell fire survivor

LONDON: Emma Louise O'Connor can no longer hear a fire truck's siren without freezing up with fright after living through Britain's worst residential fire since World War II. Seven years since London's Grenfell tower went up in flames, the 35-year-old told AFP she is still struggling to recover from the trauma, demanding justice for the victims of the disaster that killed 72 people.

A first report by a public inquiry into the 2017 tragedy laid the bulk of the blame for the fire's rapid spread across the building on its highly flammable cladding. While the tower was located in the capital's affluent area of Kensington and Chelsea, most of its inhabitants were on low incomes.

With the inquiry preparing to publish its final report on Wednesday, O'Connor remembers all too well how quickly events — and the flames — overtook her. "I ordered a delicious curry and my partner ordered pizza," she said. "We didn't even think that would be our last takeaway at our home."

Once in bed in her room on the flat's 20th floor, she remembered hearing the first two fire engines pull up outside. Two more swiftly followed, before a fire alarm started blaring on a floor below. An avid watcher of a television drama about members of the London Fire Brigade, O'Connor was initially curious about why they were there.



Emma Louise O'Connor

So, she and her partner decided to leave the tower, despite the advice at the time being to wait inside to be rescued — a decision which most likely saved their lives. During the inquiry, O'Connor was confronted with surveillance camera footage of her "ridiculously smiling" as she descended the stairs. "I was excited," she said. "But then I got down to the ground floor ... my facial expression, it was like: 'Okay, now something is quite seriously wrong.'" The couple had to duck under the flames to flee. Once sat down nearby, they then watched on as the building they once called home burnt to a husk. "And then I went into shock."

'Survivor's guilt'

The couple was eventually rehoused in another flat in Kensington, less than a kilometer from the tower. But far from being a safe haven, her new flat made her trauma "a lot worse". O'Connor, who says she has autism, arthritis-inflamed mobility issues and post-traumatic stress disorder, placed the blame on the many fire stations in the vicinity.

Every time a fire truck leaves on a call-out, she has to endure the siren's shriek. On one occasion, she narrowly avoided being run over while she stood fixed to the spot in the middle of the road. — AFP

LONDON: A public inquiry into the devastating 2017 London Grenfell Tower blaze that killed 72 people blamed the disaster on failings by the government, construction industry and, most of all, the firms involved in fitting the exterior with flammable cladding. The fire ripped through the 23-storey social housing block in one of London's richest areas during the early hours of June 14, 2017. It was Britain's deadliest blaze in a residential building since World War Two. "The simple truth is that the deaths that occurred were all avoidable," said inquiry chair Martin Moore-Bick.

In its long-awaited final report, the inquiry laid most responsibility for the disaster on the companies involved in the maintenance and refit of the apartment tower, failings by local and national authorities as well as companies which had dishonestly marketed combustible cladding materials as safe. There was also widespread criticism and blame levelled at the then-government, the local authority of Kensington and Chelsea, the industry, regulatory groups, specific individuals and an ill-prepared fire brigade for years of inaction over fire safety in high-rise blocks. "Not all of them bear the same degree of responsibility for the eventual disaster, but as our reports show, all contributed to it in one way or another, in most cases, through incompetence, but in some cases, through dishonesty and greed," Moore-Bick said.

The inquiry report, which ran to almost 1,700 pages, said the inferno was the culmination of "decades of failure", with profits put before people. "The duty of government should be to safeguard life, whilst protecting us from corporate greed," said Grenfell United, a group representing some survivors and bereaved families. "But for too long, they have aided corporations, facilitating them to profit and dictate regulation."

While British police have said 58 people

and 19 firms and organizations are under investigation, prosecutions — including for corporate manslaughter and fraud — remain years away because of the complexity and need to consider the inquiry's report. Prime Minister Keir Starmer apologized to the relatives of victims and survivors on behalf of the British state, saying they had been failed for years. "It should never have happened. The country failed to discharge its most fundamental duty, to protect you and your loved ones," he said in parliament where some bereaved relatives watched on. "Today is a long-awaited day of truth, but it must now lead to a day of justice."

Fridge fire

An earlier report by the inquiry team in 2019, which focused on the events of the night, found an electrical fault in a refrigerator in a fourth-floor apartment started the fire. Flames then spread uncontrollably, mainly because the tower had been covered during a 2016 refurbishment with cladding — exterior panels designed to improve appearance and add insulation — made of flammable aluminum composite material that acted as a source of fuel.

The harrowing accounts, including recordings from those who perished while awaiting rescuers and having followed official guidance to stay put, prompted fury and national soul-searching over building standards and the treatment of low-income communities. The inquiry, headed by retired judge Martin Moore-Bick, found a litany of failings: lessons had not been learned from past high-rise tower blazes and testing systems were inadequate.

The most overt blame was laid at the feet of those involved in the refurbishment of the tower with the flammable cladding. The inquiry said architect Studio E, principal contractor Rydon, and cladding sub-contractor Harley all bore consider-

able responsibility for disaster. Fire safety inspectors Exova were also blamed for the building being left "in a dangerous condition on completion of the refurbishment".

Both Kensington and Chelsea council and the Tenant Management Organization (TMO), which managed the local authority's housing stock, were also heavily criticized. They had shown indifference to fire safety regulations in the years before the blaze and the TMO, whose difficult relationship with some residents was said to have created a "toxic atmosphere", had been unduly focused on cutting costs.

While the local community and voluntary groups were praised for providing support, the council was also criticized for its slow, muddled and "wholly inadequate" response to the incident. There was also condemnation of those firms which made and sold the cladding or its foam insulation — Celotex, Kingspan, and Arconic Architectural Products, the French subsidiary of US company Arconic. The inquiry concluded there had been "systematic dishonesty" on their part. "They engaged in deliberate and sustained strategies to manipulate the testing processes, misrepresent tested data and mislead the market," the report said.

Arconic said it rejected any claim it had sold an unsafe product or tried to conceal information about tests of its materials. Kingspan said it had "long acknowledged the wholly unacceptable historical failings" but said these did not cause the tragedy. The issue of exterior cladding has raised concerns across Europe where there have been similar blazes in apartment blocks such as in the Spanish city of Valencia in February, and in Italy in 2021. In Britain, government figures from July showed 3,280 buildings standing at 11 meters or higher still had unsafe cladding, with remediation work yet to start on more than two-thirds of them. — Reuters

UK, Kuwait aid Gaza, Yemen...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah, said: "This year marks an important milestone for both the State of Kuwait and the UK as we jointly commemorate 125 years of partnership. Kuwait is proud of its deep-rooted and historic ties with the UK and is committed to deepening our cooperation in all its aspects. This week in London, we were happy to witness the commencement of the Kuwait Cultural Week in the UK and the successful convening of the 21st session of the Joint Steering Group (JSG). The action plan signed during the JSG paves the way for further collaboration in several fields.

"We are pleased to cooperate with the UK to support the essential work of UNICEF in both Palestine and Yemen. As pioneers in the field of international development, both our countries will continue to explore avenues of cooperation to provide development and humanitarian assistance to populations affected by conflicts and natural disasters."

UNICEF's Representative to the Gulf Area, El-tayeb Adam, said: "UNICEF deeply appreciates the generous contributions from both the UK and Ku-

wait, which will have a transformative impact on the lives of children and families in Gaza and Yemen. This funding is not just a financial commitment; it is a beacon of hope for communities struggling with the devastating consequences of conflict. Together, we can ensure that essential services such as water, sanitation, and healthcare reach those who need them most, restoring dignity and a sense of normalcy to countless lives."

The 21st UK-Kuwait JSG was co-chaired in London by Falconer and Sheikh Jarrah. On the sidelines of the JSG, Falconer and Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Waleed Al-Bahar signed two MoUs setting out details of joint funding towards UNICEF's work in Gaza and Yemen.

In addition, Falconer and Sheikh Jarrah also signed a MoU outlining planned UK support to Kuwait's Civil Service Commission on the delivery of training programs to Kuwaiti government employees, as well as an "action plan" detailing how their respective governments will drive forward cooperation on a range of key issues such as defense and security and international development and humanitarian partnerships, over the coming months.

The UK and Kuwait are celebrating 125 years of official diplomatic relations throughout 2024. On Tuesday, Falconer and Sheikh Jarrah attended the headline performance of Kuwait Cultural Week organized by Kuwait's Embassy in London titled "Rhythms of Kuwait".

its war against Hamas militants in Gaza, has sent thousands of tons of aid to Egypt for Palestinians and praised Cairo's humanitarian efforts and role as negotiator in the talks on a ceasefire and hostage deal. Sisi said they also discussed the situation in Libya, over which the two countries have long been at odds and backed opposing factions in an unresolved conflict.

"We stress that it is important to turn the page on the ongoing crisis through holding presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously with the exit of illegal foreign forces and mercenaries from the country, and put an end to the presence of armed militias to end the division," he said. Sisi said they also discussed Somalia, saying they agreed on the need to "preserve the unity and territorial integrity" of the country. — Agencies

Digital pause: School mobile...

Continued from Page 1

"pretty well overall". "The use of mobile phones in middle schools is very low today", he said, adding that in case of a problem "we have the means to act". The experiment comes after Macron said in January he wanted to "regulate the use of screens among young children."

According to a report submitted to Macron, children under 11 should not be allowed to use phones, while access to social networks should be limited for pupils under 15. With an increasing amount of research showing the risks of excessive screen time for children, the concern has become a Europe-wide issue. Sweden's Public Health Agency said this week children under the age of two should be kept away from digital media and television completely and it should be limited for more senior ages.

One of Britain's biggest mobile network operators, EE, has warned parents they should not give smartphones to children under the age of 11. The French education ministry hopes that the cellphone-free environment would improve "school climate" and reduce instances of violence including online harassment and dissemination of violent images.

The ministry also wants to improve student performance because the use of telephones harms "the ability to concentrate" and "the acquisition of knowledge". The experiment also aims to "raise pupils' awareness of the rational use of digital tools". Jerome Fournier, national secretary of the SE-UNSA teachers' union, said the experiment will seek "to respond to the difficulties of schools for which the current rule is not sufficient", even if "in the vast majority of schools it works".

According to the education ministry, "it is up to each establishment to determine practical arrangements", with the possibility of setting up a locker system. Pupils will have to hand in their phones on arrival, putting them in boxes or lockers. They will collect them at the end of classes. The ban also extends to extracurricular activities and school trips.



MARSEILLE: Schoolchildren arrive for the first day of the new academic year at a school on Sept 2, 2024. — AFP

But the enforcement of the measure across all schools in France from January 2025 could be expensive. According to local authorities, the measure could cost "nearly €130 million" for the 6,980 middle schools in France. If a phone goes missing from a locker, this would also cause an added financial problem. Education Minister Nicole Belloubet said on Tuesday that the ban would be "put in place gradually". "The financial costs seem quite modest to me", she added.

Many are skeptical. For the leading middle and high school teachers' union Snes-FSU, the ban raises too many questions. "How will things work on arrival?" wondered the head of the union, Sophie Venetay. "How will things work during the day," she said, adding that some students have two mobile phones. The SE-UNSA teachers' union also expressed reservations.

"We're going to need staff to manage arrivals, drops-off and departures, and the collection of mobile phones," said Fournier. "Sometimes pupils just have time to put their things away when classes end, and run to the bus so as not to miss it", he added. Bobkiewicz of SNPEN-Unsa, France's top union of school principals, agreed. He said he did not want to rummage through pupils' bags to look for their phones. "It's going to be complicated to implement." — AFP

Sisi, Erdogan meet to mend...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking at a joint press conference, Erdogan reiterated that Turkey and Egypt wanted to boost annual trade by \$5 billion to \$15 billion in the next five years. He added that Ankara and Cairo shared a "common stance" on the Palestinian cause, while Sisi said they were both calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to violence in the West Bank.

Turkey, which has condemned the Zionist entity for

International

Seeking re-election, Algeria's Tebboune touts achievements

As president's first term nears end, he still faces 'difficulty of bringing about profound change'

ALGIERS, Algeria: Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who assumed Algeria's presidency during mass pro-democracy protests, is touting his achievements as he seeks another term. Yet, five years after the movement faded, some say real change remains elusive. The Hirak protests, which led to the ousting of longtime autocratic president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019, aimed for a comprehensive political overhaul.

Tebboune, a minister under Bouteflika, took over as president in December that year after widely boycotted elections, as the movement was stifled and its leaders were imprisoned. Now, as he campaigns for the September 7 election, Tebboune says he has succeeded in rectifying the country's past wrongs with broad achievements and is promising more if re-elected.

Despite more than 100 weeks of demonstrations, Tebboune "dismissed the democratic transition demanded by millions of citizens", said Hasni Abidi, an Algeria analyst at the Geneva-based CERMAM Study Center. Abidi said a change in leadership alone was insufficient to bring about a "new era", despite Tebboune's frequent references to a "new Algeria".

Even as his first term nears its end, Tebboune still faced the "difficulty of bringing about profound change", he said. Algeria-based political commentator Mohamed Hennad said this change should primarily be political. "As long as political questions are not legitimately resolved, any economic, cultural, or diplomatic discourse is pure diversion," he told AFP. The Hirak movement withered away with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with a sweeping crackdown on protesters. Hundreds were arrested, and dozens remain behind bars or are still being prosecuted, according to prisoners' rights group CNLD.

'We suffered a lot'

Since taking office, Tebboune has claimed to have put Algeria back on track, frequently referring to Bouteflika's last years in power as the "mafia decade" where control of the oil-rich country was concentrated in the hands of a "gang". During his tenure, several businessmen, ministers and political figures from that era, including Bouteflika's brother Said, were convicted on corruption charges and imprisoned.

Tebboune also says he has successfully transformed Algeria into an emerging economy, now Africa's third-largest. Abidi, however, points out that Tebboune's success has been aided by a "favorable international setting", with the Ukraine-Russia war driving up natural gas prices to the benefit of Algeria, the continent's top exporter.

This economic windfall has allowed Tebboune to deliver "local-interest speeches steeped in populism", said Abidi, with promises of free housing, raising the minimum wage and higher social pensions. At a recent rally in Oran, Tebboune pledged to create 450,000 jobs and increase

monthly unemployment benefits if re-elected.

Launched in 2022, unemployment benefits now provide 13,000 dinars (\$97) to people aged 19 to 40, and Tebboune has promised to raise this to 20,000 dinars — currently the minimum wage. Despite these pledges, critics have said social and economic progress under Tebboune has been slow. But the president often defends his record by saying his achievements have come despite "a war against COVID-19 and corruption" following the Hirak movement.

Abdelhamid Megouine, a 20-year-old student in Algiers, recalls that period with bitterness. "We suffered a lot," he told AFP. "Prices and the cost of living have since increased." Although Algeria's economy has grown at a rate of about four percent over the past two years, with foreign exchange reserves reaching \$70 billion, it remains heavily dependent on oil and gas. Hydrocarbon exports account for about 95 percent of the North African country's hard currency revenues, which are crucial for sustaining social assistance programs.

Diplomacy

On foreign policy, Tebboune's tenure has seen a mix of successes and challenges. Algeria gained international attention in January when it became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, where it has been a strong advocate for Palestinian rights. However, relations with neighboring countries, especially Morocco, have worsened, largely



Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune

due to the ongoing dispute over Western Sahara. Algeria, a strong supporter of the territory's pro-independence Polisario Front, severed diplomatic ties with Morocco in August 2021 following escalating tensions over Western Sahara and Rabat's decision to normalize relations with the Zionist entity.

Similarly, relations with France, already strained due to a history of colonialism, recently suffered a blow. Last month, French President Macron said Morocco's autonomy plan was the only solution for Western Sahara, which the United Nations still considers as a "non-self-governing" territory. In response, Algiers withdrew its ambassador to France, condemning the move as a "step that no other French government had taken before". — AFP

Macho MAGA? Trump locks in America's hyper-masculine vote

JOHNSTOWN, United States: He lauds strongmen autocrats, hangs with martial arts stars, and has no greater compliment than calling someone a "fighter." Donald Trump is going all out for the macho vote in November's election — and it's working. The real estate tycoon and former president has long crafted an often cartoonish, hyper-masculine image — most controversially including bragging about sexual assault.

Now, in an election where Kamala Harris is vying to become America's first woman president, Trump's macho powers are being put to the ultimate test. Harris is seeing a surge in female support and has made the question of abortion rights a top campaign issue. Trump, meanwhile, is unapologetically drilling down into the part of the electorate that loves cryptocurrency, the ultra-violent Ultimate Fighting Championship, and thinks society has become too feminine and "woke."

"He speaks to our generation," said Nick Passano, standing with four tattooed fellow Millennial cryptocurrency investors who dub themselves the Macho Boys, at Trump's Make America Great Again, or MAGA, rally in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, last Friday. "We have to set the tone in regards to what we want our children to emulate, which is strong masculine men. And he very much represents that," said Passano, 37, one of several men who spoke to AFP about the "manosphere" aligning with Trump.

They wore shirts with crass imagery and said he should not put up with "any more BS." It might seem a stretch for a billionaire, golf-playing 78-year-old to pose as a bad boy, but Trump knows more than perhaps any other US politician about marketing.

His response to being convicted on 34 felony charges in New York in May was to attend a UFC bout a few days later, winning thunderous applause from the crowd of 16,000. And at July's Republican convention, just days after Trump survived an assassination attempt, pro wrestling icon Hulk Hogan ripped his shirt off and hailed Trump as a "gladiator." Voters, it seems, are watching: a new ABC News/Ipsos poll finds Trump up against Harris by five points among men — and Harris leading among women by 13.

Alpha male



JOHNSTOWN: Nick Passano (left), a tattooed Millennial cryptocurrency investor, holds his hand to his heart during an invocation by a pastor during a political rally where former Donald Trump spoke. — AFP

When President Joe Biden was still seeking reelection, Trump's strategy was unambiguous. Although only slightly younger than the president, Trump hammered his opponent as weak and senile — and reveled in the battering he delivered during their June debate. The entry of 59-year-old Harris means Trump is facing someone far younger. Trump also has to contend with the risk that his brash — critics would say bullying — style will backfire against a female and Black opponent.

But University of Pittsburgh communications professor Paul Johnson said Trump won't — and likely can't — switch tone. Trump is pushing the "Trumpian worldview," Johnson told AFP — a world that is "nasty" and where "real Americans" need to be ready to fight for it, to say uncomfortable and racist truths about the world, and if necessary to use violence.

This is reflected in Trump's frequent reposting of crude, sexualized attacks on Harris and his attempt to play the race card by questioning whether she is really black. For young voters at the Johnstown rally, however, that's just Trump being unafraid. "Him being himself I feel is the reason I like him so much," said Wyatt Waszo, a 21-year-old restaurant worker.

Fighting 'male malaise'

The macho movement goes far deeper than just Trump. Trump's claims about Democrats jettisoning masculinity and killing off male-dominated blue-collar professions like manufacturing and mining strike a chord in electorally strategic rust belt communities.

And it's a message echoed on countless right-wing radio shows and influential podcasts about the so-called "male malaise." It's a backlash against globalism and the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, said Kristin Kobes Du Mez, a professor of history and gender studies at Calvin University. "Trump's game is playing into fears of losing what you have."

Polling by nonpartisan researchers PerryUndem last year shows 82 percent of Republican men say society today punishes men "just for acting like men." Harris has so far notably avoided anchoring her campaign around the historic goal of a first female presidency. And Democrats hope her earthy running mate Tim Walz will help balance the ticket in the gender wars. The 60-year-old Minnesota governor may be a liberal, but it's the other half of his CV that the party thinks helps him most: military veteran, former school football coach, hunter and ice-fisherman. — AFP

US ex-official charged with selling influence to China for cash, ducks

NEW YORK: A former official who worked as an aide to the governor of New York state was arrested and charged with working as an agent of China in return for millions of dollars, prosecutors said on Tuesday. The woman, Linda Sun, allegedly sought to broker meetings between Chinese and New York officials, while working to thwart such meetings with Taiwanese officials.

In return, Sun allegedly received "substantial" economic incentives with which she funded a lavish lifestyle, tickets to a visiting Chinese orchestra and Nanjing-style salted ducks prepared by a visiting Chinese official's chef. "The illicit scheme enriched the defendant's family to the tune of millions of dollars," United States Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement.

Peace added that Sun's husband Christopher Hu "facilitated the transfer of millions of dollars in kickbacks for personal gain." Sun wielded her position of influence among executives to covertly promote (Chinese) and (Chinese Communist Party) agendas, directly threatening our country's national security," the statement read.

Both pleaded not guilty to the charges and were released on bail with a proviso that they must not contact any Chinese diplomatic mission. Prosecutors allege that the pair laundered the proceeds of their crimes and purchased a \$4.1 million property on New York's Long Island and a \$2.1 million Hawaii condo along with a 2024 Ferrari.

China's foreign ministry on Wednesday said that it was not aware of the situation concerning Sun. "I will not comment on domestic cases in the United States," spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular press briefing. "But we oppose any malicious association or slander against China," she added. — AFP

Japan eradicates rabbit-killing mongooses on isle

TOKYO: Japan has wiped out all mongooses on a subtropical island, officials said, after the animals ignored the venomous snakes they were brought in to hunt and preyed on endangered local rabbits instead. About 30 of the venom-resistant predators were released on Amami Oshima, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in the late 1970s to keep down the population of habu, a pit viper whose bite can be deadly to humans. However, the snakes are mostly active at night when mongooses prefer to sleep and the toothy mammals turned their ravenous appetites to local Amami rabbits, drastically reducing their numbers. "It is said that the mongooses, which are active during the day, rarely came into contact with the nocturnal habu snakes," a local official told AFP.

The rabbits only live on Amami Oshima and one other island and are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list. The mongoose population had exploded to around 10,000 by 2000 and Japanese authorities began a program of eradication that reportedly included specially trained sniffer dogs.

The government declared the island mongoose-free on Tuesday, almost 25 years after the start of that program and nearly 50 since the ill-fated initiative began. "(This) is genuinely good news for our prefecture and for conservation of World Natural Heritage site Amami's precious ecosystem," local



A mongoose is seen in a cage after being captured by authorities in Japan in this undated handout photo by Japan's Ministry of the Environment. — AFP

governor Koichi Shiota said in a statement.

"There are many lessons we should learn from the impact on native ecosystem that mongooses brought, and efforts and costs required for us to eradicate it," he said. More than 37,000 alien species have taken hold worldwide far from their places of origin, costing upwards of \$400 billion a year in damages and lost income, a UN panel said in 2023. — AFP

Pope warns against extremism in Muslim majority Indonesia

JAKARTA: Pope Francis on Wednesday urged political leaders in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, to guard against religious extremism, which he said distorted people's beliefs through "deception and violence". On a packed first full day of his longest ever overseas journey that includes nine days in Southeast Asia, where Christians are a small minority, the pontiff also met local Catholics and asked them not to force their faith on others.

In a speech to Indonesia's political leaders, Francis said the Catholic Church would increase its efforts toward inter-religious dialogue in hopes of helping tamp down extremism. "In this way, prejudices can be eliminated, and a climate of mutual respect and trust can grow," the 87-year-old pope said in an address at Jakarta's presidential palace. "This is indispensable for meeting common challenges, including that of countering extremism and intolerance, which through the distortion of religion attempt to impose their views by using deception and violence," said Francis.

About 87 percent of Indonesia's population of 280 million is Muslim. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the country's constitution. Though Indonesia has seen some instances of Islamist violence in recent years, including suicide bombings in 2021 and 2022 linked to an Islamic State-inspired group, religious extremism has been on a decline since a spate of high-profile attacks two decades ago that included the 2002



JAKARTA: Pope Francis and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo attend a meeting at the Presidential Palace on September 4, 2024. — AFP

Bali bombing, which killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. Indonesia's president of 10 years, Joko Widodo, thanked Francis for his calls for a ceasefire in the Gaza war. "Indonesia appreciates the Vatican's attitude which continues to voice (and) call for peace," he said in his welcoming speech.

In his public remarks, Francis did not mention any specific violent incidents, but made several references to extremism, intolerance and manipulation of religion. "There are times when faith in God is ... sadly manipulated to foment divisions and increase hatred instead of furthering peace, communion, dialogue, respect, cooperation and fraternity," said the pontiff. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said Francis and Widodo had not spoken specifically about the Gaza war in their meeting, but more generally about ongoing conflicts and "the importance of peace". — Reuters

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

Xi hosts two dozen African leaders at China's biggest summit in years

Conference kicks off with promises of cooperation in infrastructure, energy and education



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping (center) and his wife Peng Liyuan pose for a group photograph with leaders from African nations at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Sept 4, 2024. — AFP

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted more than two dozen African leaders at a banquet in Beijing on Wednesday evening, kicking off the city's biggest summit in years with promises of cooperation in infrastructure, energy and education. China, the world's number two economy, is Africa's largest trading partner and has sought to tap the continent's vast troves of natural resources including copper, gold, lithium and rare earth minerals.

It has also furnished African countries with billions in loans that have helped build much-needed infrastructure but also sometimes stoked controversy by saddling governments with huge debts.

Twenty-five African leaders have arrived in Beijing or confirmed attendance at this week's China-Africa forum, according to an AFP tally, including some whose countries face a rising risk of debt distress.

Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan welcomed guests as they arrived for a lavish dinner at the Great Hall of the People on Wednesday evening, live AFP footage showed. There was also a "family" photo of the gathered leaders and Xi will give a speech at an opening ceremony on Thursday morning.

Chinese state media has lauded Xi this week as a "true friend of Africa", claiming Beijing's ties were reaching "new heights" under his stewardship. The Chinese leader had held talks with more than a dozen African counterparts in Beijing by Wednesday, a tally of state media reporting showed.

Xi called during a meeting on Tuesday with President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria — one of China's biggest borrowers on the continent — for great cooperation in the "development of infrastructure, energy and mineral resources", state news agency Xinhua said. He also promised cooperation in "investment,

trade, infrastructure, mineral resources" and other areas during talks on the same day with Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Xi backed Zimbabwe in its struggle against "illegal sanctions" imposed by the United States in response to corruption and human rights abuses by the country's leadership.

Analysts say that Beijing's largesse towards Africa is being recalibrated in the face of economic trouble at home and that geopolitical concerns over a growing tussle with the United States may increasingly be driving policy. "Deepening economic engagement with Africa across the board" is one of Beijing's key goals this week, Zainab Usman, director of the Africa Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told AFP.

"In specific areas, even where such an expanded engagement may not make economic sense, it will be driven by geopolitical reasons," she said. One

goal may be narrowing the growing trade imbalance between China and Africa through increasing imports of agricultural goods and processed minerals, Usman said. "Meeting these African demands is in China's geopolitical interest to keep them inside in the tussle with the US."

For their part, African leaders are likely to seek backing for big-ticket items, as they have in the past, but also place greater emphasis on debt sustainability, analysts say.

Recent deadly protests in Kenya were triggered by the government's need "to service its debt burden to international creditors, including China", said Alex Vines, head of the Africa Programme at London's Chatham House. Vines and other analysts expect African leaders at this week's forum to seek not only more Chinese investment but also more favorable loans in light of such events. — AFP

Lebanon's ex-CB chief Salameh to remain in detention until hearing

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese central bank chief Riad Salameh, who was arrested on Tuesday over alleged financial crimes, will remain in detention at least until a hearing is scheduled, likely next week, two judicial sources told Reuters on Wednesday. After the hearing, the presiding judge can decide whether to keep Salameh in detention, the sources said, adding that no decision had yet been taken. One of them said the judge was expected to schedule a hearing for early next week.

Reuters could not immediately reach a lawyer for Salameh. Salameh, 73, was the bank governor for 30 years but his final years were marred by the collapse of Lebanon's financial system along with charges of financial crimes, including illicit enrichment through public funds, by authorities in Lebanon and several Western countries. The state-owned National News Agency said prosecutor Ali Ibrahim, to whom the case was referred by public prosecutor Jamal Al-Hajjar on Wednesday, charged Salameh with "embezzlement, theft of public funds, forgery, and illicit enrichment", before referring the case to investigating judge Bilal Halawi, who will set the date for the hearing.

Two judicial sources told Reuters on Tuesday that Salameh had been held on charges of accruing more than \$110 million via financial crimes involving Optimum Invest, a Lebanese firm that offers income brokerage services. The authorities have not published the charges against him. Neither Salameh nor his lawyer responded to requests for comment on Tuesday. Salameh has previously denied all accusations of financial crimes. Tuesday's charges are separate from previous charges of financial crimes linked to Forry Associates, a company controlled by Salameh's brother, Raja. — Reuters



BEIRUT: Lebanon's Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh poses during a studio photo session in the capital Beirut, on December 20, 2021. — AFP



MIAMI, US: Avianca Cargo employees unload flower crates from a cargo plane at the Miami International Airport in Miami, Florida. — AFP

US trade deficit expands on imports surge

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit in July expanded to its largest since mid-2022, according to government data released Wednesday, as imports rose more quickly than exports. Overall, the trade gap widened to \$78.8 billion, from a revised \$73.0 billion in June, the Department of Commerce said.

The growth was slightly more than analysts expected and the widest since June 2022.

Businesses were likely to be frontloading imports ahead of an increase in tariffs, analysts say, given that Washington earlier unveiled plans to hike levies on Chinese goods ranging from semiconductors to batteries and solar panels. In July, imports jumped 2.1 percent to \$345.4 billion, boosted by capital goods like computer accessories, as well as by industrial supplies. Exports, meanwhile, edged up 0.5 percent to \$266.6 billion, the Commerce Department report said.

Among individual segments, exports of semiconductors rose but auto shipments and that of consumer goods fell as well. Capital goods imports have been supported by boosts from investments relating to government incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act and CHIPS Act, said Matthew Mar-

tin, US economist at Oxford Economics. Another source of support is the prospect of lower interest rates, he added. "Depleted inventories and resilient consumer demand should ensure the other components of imports stay on a strong growth path as well," said Martin.

US consumer demand has held up in the face of high interest rates, as the central bank hiked the benchmark lending rate in recent years to counter soaring inflation. Households have continued spending, dipping into savings, supported by a robust jobs market. A reduction in interest rates, widely expected later this month, could bring the world's biggest economy a further boost. Exports have had a harder time with global demand weakening and with a strong dollar, analysts noted earlier.

In July, the US goods deficit with China increased by \$4.9 billion to \$27.2 billion, as exports fell and imports picked up. "The trade gap with China blew out in July," said economists Carl Weinberg and Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics in a note.

"The surge in imports may reflect efforts to get goods into the United States before elections bring more tariffs on their products at the border," the note added. But on a quarterly basis, the goods deficit with China — a contentious issue during the trade war between both countries — narrowed to \$68.2 billion in the second quarter this year.

This was the smallest since the first quarter of 2020. "This report confirms that trade continues to drag down GDP growth at the start of the third quarter," said Weinberg and Farooqi. — AFP

OPEC+ discussing delay to planned oil output hike

LONDON: OPEC+ is discussing a delay in a planned output increase next month as oil prices hit their lowest in 9 months, three sources from the producer group told Reuters on Wednesday. Oil prices LCO1c have been falling together with other asset classes on concerns about a weak global economy and particularly soft data from China, the world's biggest oil importer.

Last week, the group looked set to proceed with a 180,000 barrel per day (bpd) hike in October, but market volatility from oil facility shutdowns in Libya and a weak demand outlook have raised concern within the group, one of the sources said. There were suggestions to delay the increase, one of the sources said. Another said a delay was looking highly possible.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the Saudi government communications office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Eight members of the OPEC+ — which includes its allies — are scheduled to raise output by 180,000 bpd in October as part of a plan to begin unwinding their most recent layer of output cuts of 2.2 million bpd while keeping other cuts in place until the end of next year.

Brent crude traded 1 percent higher at \$74.47 a barrel at 1104 GMT on Wednesday, rising on the news of the potential delay, but remained at its lowest since December. Prices have experienced high volatility in recent weeks as a standoff between rival factions in OPEC producer Libya over control of the central bank led to a loss of at least 700,000 bpd of production.

Prices slumped by about 5 percent on Tuesday on news that a possible deal to resolve the conflict was in the works. Weak Chinese demand and a slump in global refining margins which could translate into refiners processing less crude, have also weighed.

"While the APAC region was supposed to carry a majority of the growth this year, China's underperformance has dented 2024 growth projections and has continued to trail both 2023 crude import and refinery throughput levels," RBC Capital analyst Helima Croft said in a note. — Reuters

NBK leads The Banker's 2024 list of top 100 Arab banks in Kuwait

Rating reinforces NBK's brand excellence and showcases its robust financial strength

- The recognition highlights the bank's position as a preeminent leader in the region.
- NBK leads in operational efficiency across all Kuwaiti banks.
- The rating highlights the bank's balance sheet strength and excellence in several key financial metrics.

- It reflects the quality of NBK's profits, grounded in solid performance across all business sectors.
- The bank retained its position as the ninth-ranked bank in the region.

KUWAIT: In a testament to the enduring strength of its banking brand and robust financial standing, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has soared to the pinnacle of The Banker's 2024 ranking of the top 100 Arab banks, securing the premier position within Kuwait while sustaining its distinguished ninth place among regional banks.

In its annual ranking of the top 100 Arab banks, The Banker magazine evaluated various criteria, with a focus on Tier 1 capital, assets, profitability, asset quality, return on capital, and return on assets. Leveraging its ro-

ing the strength of its balance sheet and its superior performance across several key financial indicators relative to its peers. The Bank's placement on the list of the region's top financial institutions accentuates the superior quality of its profits, which are firmly anchored in robust foundations across all its business sectors. Moreover, it underscores NBK's exceptional geographical reach, extending across four continents and 13 countries.

Last year, NBK distinguished itself as one of the few banks globally to be honored with several presti-



THE BANKER

bust financial position and impressive performance metrics, NBK achieved an eighth-place ranking in total assets, boasting a return on assets of 1.56 percent and a return on capital of approximately 15 percent. NBK led the ranking in Kuwait for Tier 1 capital, which amounted to \$12.8 billion as of the end of 2023, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 7.48 percent. Additionally, the Bank excelled in operational efficiency, securing the top position among all Kuwaiti banks.

NBK's inclusion in this prestigious list underscores its leadership on both regional and global stages, highlight-

ing the strength of its balance sheet and its superior performance across several key financial indicators relative to its peers. The Bank's placement on the list of the region's top financial institutions accentuates the superior quality of its profits, which are firmly anchored in robust foundations across all its business sectors. Moreover, it underscores NBK's exceptional geographical reach, extending across four continents and 13 countries.

Last year, NBK distinguished itself as one of the few banks globally to be honored with several presti-

gious awards for its innovations in digital banking. Additionally, the Bank achieved a notably high ranking in the customer satisfaction index.

The Bank maintains one of the highest credit ratings among major banks in the Middle East, as affirmed by the consensus of the three leading global credit rating agencies — Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's. This prestigious standing is bolstered by its robust capitalization, prudent lending policies, systematic risk management approach, and the expertise and stability of its management and executive team. In

2023, the bank reported a net profit of KD 560.6 million (\$1.8 billion), reflecting a year-on-year growth of 10.1 percent. Additionally, net operating income surged by 15.6 percent, reaching KD 1.2 billion (\$3.8 billion). By the end of 2023,

the bank's assets stood at \$122.8 billion, marking a growth of 3.7 percent.

Established in 1926, the internationally renowned magazine "The Banker," a distinguished part of the British Financial Times, stands as one of the most presti-

gious publications in the financial sector. It undertakes extensive surveys of leading financial institutions across approximately 120 countries to spotlight the most prominent and exemplary banks in the global banking community.

Eurozone bonds gain as investor nerves jangle

LONDON: Eurozone government bonds held gains on Wednesday as investors' nervousness over upcoming US jobs data this week has ignited widespread volatility and driven capital flows into traditional safe-haven assets. Risk aversion this week has racked global markets as concern mounts ahead of Friday's US employment report that could determine the size of any interest-rate cut by the Federal Reserve this month.

The jumpiness is all the greater because September is typically the worst month for equity market returns. Bund yields posted their largest one-day fall in a month on Tuesday, with a drop of 6 bps, while two-year yields fell by a more modest 3.8 bps.

The European Central Bank, which meets next week, is expected to deliver another quarter-point rate cut. Board member Piero Cipolletton told a French newspaper on Wednesday the central bank had room to lower rates and was at risk of becoming too restrictive.

Benchmark 10-year Bund yields edged down nearly 4 basis points to 2.235 percent, while two-year yields were down 5 bps at 2.332 percent. Commerzbank analysts noted that a steep drop in the oil price on Tuesday has helped the longer end of the Bund curve, as investors factor in how that might further suppress inflation and, therefore, the need for deeper rate cuts.

ECB policymaker Joachim Nagel, who has typically favored higher rates, was quoted as saying on Tuesday "the great wave of inflation is over", but added he would not decide whether to vote to cut rates in September until next week.

A German trade group on Wednesday sounded the alarm as the country's exporters face a recession in foreign trade. Europe's largest economy is already struggling. In the short term, fixed income investors will stay focused on swings in the broader markets and on US employment data releases, starting with monthly layoffs and hiring numbers due later on Wednesday.

The wait will be over by Friday, when the US monthly employment report lands. Economists polled by Reuters expect to see a rise of 160,000 in the number of workers on nonfarm payrolls in August, versus July's 114,000 increase. Until then, government bonds were likely to fluctuate along with investor risk appetite, Jefferies strategist Mohit Kumar said. "We are keeping our modest bullish bias on risky assets despite yesterday moves, but we are keeping the size of our positions small. As argued yesterday, it is a prudent idea to have some hedges in place as we expect increased volatility over the coming weeks," he said. Separately, Germany sold around 2.2 billion euros in top-ups of 15-year debt, achieving modestly lower yields and stronger demand. Elsewhere, Italian 10-year yields were down 2.7 bps at 3.642 percent, leaving their premium over Bunds flat at 139.9 bps. — Reuters

Cathay flights to resume fully by Saturday

HONG KONG: Cathay Pacific said it will resume full operations by Saturday after replacing defective engine fuel lines on its Airbus A350 planes, a problem that forced it to cancel dozens of flights this week.

Hong Kong-based Cathay, one of the largest operators worldwide of the A350 jetliner, grounded 48 planes for checks on Monday after a Zurich-bound flight had to return to the city shortly after take-off.

The inspection found that components on 15 of the A350s — whose engines are powered by British manufacturer Rolls-Royce — had to be replaced. "Fifteen aircraft were identified with engine fuel lines that require replacement. Of these, six have already undergone successful repairs and are cleared to operate," Cathay said in a statement. "The remaining nine aircraft will be repaired and are expected to resume operation by Saturday." When Cathay had initially raised the alarm Monday, it said "the component was the first of its type to suffer such failure on any A350 aircraft worldwide".

The incident prompted other airlines in the region to carry out similar checks on their A350-900 and A350-1000 models. Cathay has so far cancelled 90 flights between Monday to Saturday, with mainly regional routes

including connections to Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo, and Bangkok hit.

Aboard a Cathay A350-900 plane to San Francisco on Wednesday, a Hong Kong passenger surnamed Yuen told AFP that he was "worried but I don't know who I can ask whether this aircraft has been checked". "I would feel better if Cathay could send us a message saying the plane has been checked but they never did that," Yuen texted from the runway.

Japan Airlines confirmed that three of their A350 jets turned up no issues, while two more were undergoing inspections Wednesday. A Thai Airways spokesperson said Wednesday the airline was using their A350 planes as normal, while Singapore Airlines said they had carried out checks and there was "no impact" on flights operating with their A350-900 fleet. In Europe, Air France — which uses A350-900 models — said it was in contact with Airbus and Rolls-Royce. Both firms "have not advised or mandated airlines to perform any checks", it said.

And in the Middle East, Qatar Airways said "there has been no impact on the operation of any Qatar Airways Airbus A350-1000s", adding that it was monitoring the situation.

With 24 aircraft in its fleet, the Gulf state carrier is the world's largest operator of the A350-1000 model — the same type of aircraft Cathay had to return en route to Zurich.

Airbus and Rolls-Royce have so far said they are cooperating with Cathay, and an ongoing investigation prevents them from commenting further. Hong Kong's Civil Aviation Department



HONG KONG: A Cathay Pacific staff talks to passengers at the international airport in Hong Kong on Sept 4, 2024. — AFP

said Wednesday it has contacted the EU Aviation Safety Agency and other relevant aviation authorities to notify them about the case. Terence Fan, an aviation expert at Singapore Management University, said defective engine lines could affect fuel flow, which is "urgent and of critical importance".

"This seems to be a mechanical issue... one would definitely not want the same to be found in two out of two engines on the same aircraft mid-air," he told AFP.

Fan said a mechanical problem can be fixed quickly by replacing parts, though he called it "a bad sign" the issue hit one-third of Cathay's A350 fleet. The A350 plane is

often deployed in long-haul flights that traverse oceans and sparsely populated areas with few airports to divert to if there are issues.

Last November, Emirates chief executive Tim Clark expressed concerns about the durability and longevity of A350 engines. Qatar Airways also had a long-running dispute with Airbus over its jets, which was only resolved in 2023. Qatar grounded the jets in 2021 after paint started peeling on the exterior of some of its A350 planes. Its regulator said there could be a threat to the jet's lightning protection. Rolls-Royce has defended its Trent XWB-97 engines and said it was taking steps to improve their durability. — AFP

British banks brace for possible tax rise in Labour budget

LONDON: Banks in Britain are intensifying their lobbying against possible tax hikes in the new Labour government's first budget next month, amid concerns it may tap the sector to boost public finances, senior industry sources told Reuters. Neither Prime Minister Keir Starmer nor Finance Minister Rachel Reeves has said banks will have to pay higher taxes, but Starmer's recent reference to the burden falling on those with "broader shoulders" has fuelled concerns, three sources said.

Banks have enjoyed bumper profits in recent years on the back of higher interest rates.

Reeves is due to meet senior sector representatives in the coming days, when bankers expect a rise in taxes on bank profits will be discussed, two of the sources said.

A spokesperson for the Treasury said it would not comment on "speculation about tax changes outside of a fiscal event". The sources, who declined

to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter, said they anticipate the Treasury will seek to raise an existing surcharge that banks already pay.

This was the simplest way Reeves could tap the sector to help fill a 22 billion pound (\$28.8 billion) hole in public finances in her Oct 30 budget, the sources said. This would be easier than cutting the amount of interest UK banks earn on reserves parked at the Bank of England, which could distort the effects of its monetary policy, they added. HSBC, Britain's largest bank, posted a 78 percent rise in 2023 pretax profit to \$30.3 billion pounds in February and competitors including NatWest Group and Barclays have recorded similarly robust returns. British bank shares dipped briefly last week after the Financial Times quoted an unnamed former government official making the case for a "sensibly crafted" levy on banks.

The bank levy was introduced in 2011 to curb excessive risk and reckless growth following the global financial crisis. While the sector has since stockpiled billions of pounds in capital against its activities, no UK government has made a serious attempt to phase out the revenue-raising tool.

A spokesperson for UK Finance, which represents UK banks, told Reuters it was aware of

the rising concern. The trade body is poised to reiterate calls for the banks levy and corporation tax surcharge to be phased out altogether in its pre-budget submission to the Treasury, which is accepting feedback until Sept 10, the spokesperson said. "Banks based in the UK pay a significantly higher rate of tax than those in New York. And our analysis shows that they are expected to pay notably higher rates of tax in future years than in other European capitals," UK Finance said.

Simon Youel, Head of Policy and Advocacy at campaign group Positive Money, told Reuters that any increase to the banking surcharge or bank levy should not be viewed as tax hikes, "but rather a reversal of tax cuts given to banks under the Conservative government". Starmer and Reeves host Britain's annual investment summit next month, where they hope to persuade international investors representing billions of pounds of capital to bankroll their plans to revive the country's lackluster economic growth. "All of the legislation that happened last year was designed to create a more competitive environment and was all supported by Labour," one of the sources said. "The industry would be confused and disappointed if something like this went ahead. The banks are certainly not just resigned to something like this." — Reuters

Business

Gulf Bank launches 'Back to School' campaign with exclusive discounts

Bank's credit and prepaid cardholders to get up to 20% discount

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing social responsibility efforts to support the community in the upcoming school year, Gulf Bank has launched the 'Back to School' campaign, rewarding credit and prepaid cardholders with exclusive discounts of up to 20 percent at LuLu Hypermarket, Dabdoob, and the Landmark Group (Max and Centrepoint).

LuLu Hypermarket is offering Gulf Bank's Credit and Prepaid cardholders 15 percent discount, while LuLu Prepaid cardholders will get an exclusive 20 percent discount until September 20, 2024. Landmark Group stores including Centrepoint & Max are also offering a 20 percent discount until Sept 20, 2024. Additionally, Dabdoob is offering a 15 percent discount until Sept 14, 2024.

In collaboration with our numerous partners, Gulf Bank delivers exclusive offers and discounts annually during the Back-to-School season. Additionally, the Bank offers financial services such as

educational loans and encourages savings through its savings accounts.

The Bank is committed to supporting the community's aspirations on various occasions and helping shape the future of the next generation of leaders and pioneers, while continuously striving to deliver the best products and services, ensuring an exceptional customer experience." Through its "Gulf Points" rewards program, Gulf Bank allows customers to redeem points for airline tickets on any global airline and book accommodations at over 300,000 hotels worldwide, offering one of the most convenient rewards systems in Kuwait.

Gulf Bank credit cards offer a variety of benefits for customers. These cards provide access to a wide range of deals across various sectors, including restaurants, hotels, tourism, travel, entertainment, health and beauty, car rentals, and more. Credit cardholders can take advantage of a wide array of discounts and benefits at

many restaurants, cafes, and retail stores throughout Kuwait. These exclusive, ongoing offers include more than 550 restaurants and cafes, and over 300 retail stores.

Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.



News in Brief

Spain boosts Venezuela oil imports

MADRID: Spain's crude oil imports from Venezuela this year have already topped 2023's total, data released by Cores, an arm of the Energy and Environment Ministry, showed on Wednesday. In July, Spain imported 353,000 tons of crude from Venezuela, taking the January-July total to 1.7 million tons. That was almost triple the amount for the same period last year and topped 2023's total of 1.4 million tons. OPEC member Venezuela posted a rise in oil exports in the first half of the year, helped by US licenses and authorizations to partners of state oil company PDVSA. — Reuters

German car sales plunge in Aug

FRANKFURT: Sales of new cars plummeted in Germany in August, official data showed Wednesday, dragged down by a record fall in demand for electric vehicles in Europe's biggest auto market. A total of 197,322 new cars were registered in Germany last month, the KBA federal transport authority said, a 27.8-percent drop on a year earlier. The fall was led by a "historic decline" in sales in battery-powered electric vehicles (EVs), the VDIK car importers' federation said, which plunged by 68.8 percent to just over 27,000 units. — AFP

Australia posts 'soft' growth

SYDNEY: Australia's ailing economy recorded another quarter of near moribund growth, with data Wednesday showing second-quarter gross domestic product expanded just 0.2 percent from the previous three months. The Australian Bureau of Statistics said government spending had just about offset "subdued" consumer activity in the three months to June, as consumers continued to feel the pinch from high prices. Treasurer Jim Chalmers blamed the "soft growth" on "global economic uncertainty, higher interest rates and persistent but moderating inflation". — AFP

Greece wraps up bank privatizations

ATHENS: Greece plans to conclude the re-privatization of its banks by early October with the sale of its last stake in National Bank, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Wednesday. The planned sale marks a rebound for the Greek banking sector, which was bailed out during a debt crisis in which Greece nearly dropped out of the eurozone and international lenders imposed strict austerity measures in return for loans. It also means an end to the bailout fund, known as HFSF, which was launched in 2010 to protect Greece's biggest banks and limit contagion across Europe's financial system. The fund still owns 18.4 percent of National Bank (NBG), Greece's largest lender with a market value of 7.2 billion euros. — Reuters

IMF starts fifth review of its Ukraine program

KYIV: An International Monetary Fund mission began work on Wednesday on the fifth review of its \$15.6 billion lending program to Ukraine amid a major wartime government reshuffle. The IMF is a key international lender to Kyiv and its four-year program is a crucial part of a bigger global economic support package to the country, which is gearing up for a third winter trying to fend off Russia's full-scale invasion. Kyiv is spending about 60 percent of its total budget to fund its army and relies heavily on financial support from its Western partners to pay pensions and wages to public sector employees and finance social and humanitarian spending. — Reuters



Deliveroo charity event.



A group photo taken during the charity event.

Deliveroo, IICO and stc mark Int'l Charity Day

KUWAIT: In celebration of International Charity Day, and as part of its Full Life campaign, Deliveroo collaborated with the Islamic International Charity Organization (IICO) and telecommunications leader, stc, to support underprivileged communities in Kuwait. The collaborative effort saw the distribution of essential food boxes, refreshing

juices, and stc prepaid cards to underprivileged families across Kuwait.

Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager of Deliveroo Kuwait & Qatar, commented: "International Charity Day is a reminder of the power of community and giving. We are honored to work with IICO and stc on this initiative, which aligns with our Full Life campaign's mission to tackle food insecurity and make a positive impact on the lives of those who need it most."

The food boxes, packed with nutritious items and refreshing juices, were designed to offer support to families along with stc prepaid cards to help with communication and connectivity. "This collaboration is a testament to the power of partnership

in making a real difference," said Khaled Al-Shuaib, the Director of the Volunteering Department at the Islamic International Charity Organization. "We are grateful for Deliveroo and stc's support on this initiative, which will undoubtedly bring much-needed support to many families."

"At stc, we believe in using our resources to support the communities we serve," said Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc. "Providing prepaid cards is our way of contributing to the connectivity of families with loved ones. We are proud to be part of this meaningful initiative." Deliveroo's Full Life campaign is an initiative aimed at granting food security to families all over the world.

Eco-friendly French cargo ship revives wind navigation

NEW YORK: A French ship navigating past New York City to harbor laden with Champagne, Cognac and jam under sail might recall a long-forgotten age of wind navigation.

But with the Anemos, the world's largest cargo sail ship, a French company is seeking to revive the eco-friendly and cost-effective technology to become a regular fixture on the high seas once again. There has been increased interest in recent years in the use of sail technology to move cargo as fuel costs and environmental concerns have mounted

Coal generates less than 50% of Australian electricity for first time

SYDNEY: Coal generated less than 50 percent of Australia's electricity in the last week of August, dropping to a record low as renewable production surged, data showed Wednesday. According to market monitor Open-NEM, coal generated 49.1 percent of the country's electricity, while renewables accounted for 48.7 percent as storms boosted wind production.

Coal still accounts for a third of global electricity generation, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), and demand for the climate-warming fossil fuel reached a record high in 2022.

But for the world to reach net zero by 2050, all coal generation without abatement measures must end by 2040, the IEA says. Australia remains one of the world's leading exporters of coal and gas and has relied heavily on fossil fuels to keep the lights on. But climate finance expert Tim Buckley said August's record figures were caused by wild weather and a warm start to the spring, which had reduced demand on the grid by up to 20 percent.

Winds exceeding 150 kilometers (93.2 miles) per hour in the southeast of the country had also almost doubled the usual wind generation. "It's a historically low coal share for Australia in the national energy market, but it's also a sign of where we are going," Buckley told AFP. "It will only be a few years from now that coal is contributing virtually nothing," he added.

As recently as 2000, more than 80 percent of electricity in Australia was generated from coal, but the figure has mostly been declining since then. With most of Australia's 16 coal-fired power

stations to close in the coming years, government and industry are racing to invest in the renewable energy sector.

Canberra unveiled on Wednesday six battery projects to be built across South Australia and Victoria that will provide 1,000 megawatts of storage by 2027.

And last month it approved plans for a massive solar and battery farm capable of supplying domestic needs and exporting power to Singapore. Energy Minister Chris Bowen said the energy transition was going to happen because "the climate demands it, and economic reality demands it".

"We must be implementing sensible solutions

for both shipping companies and consumers. Anemos completed its inaugural 18-day transatlantic sailing from the French port of Le Havre to the Port of Newark Tuesday, and Guillaume Le Grand, chief executive of operator TOWT, hopes it will be the first of many. "They're the largest sailing vessels around and we're starting to make an impact," he said of the ship and its sister vessel, Artemis, due to be launched in Vietnam Wednesday.

"We were full on this crossing and there's strong demand. Six more (vessels) are ordered already," Le Grand added, explaining that clients increasingly want to know the carbon intensity of their shipping. Anemos, which is 81-meters long, carried with it 1,000 tons of cargo. The inaugural sailing of Anemos was not without difficulties, with the backup motor used and refinements having to be made to the setup of the ship and its giant double sails. "This was a little but challenging, we had to manage the

routing. We are improving the tuning of the sails,"

captain of the nine-person crew Hadrien Busson told AFP. The vessel uses a computerized, robotic rigging system to adjust the vast sails which make the ship 206 feet tall.

With around one billion tons of carbon dioxide emitted every year, shipping is responsible for almost three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which aims to achieve carbon neutrality in the sector by 2050. Wind is already used by some forty large cargo ships worldwide, according to the International Windship Association.

But that is a drop in the ocean when compared to the 105,000 vessels worldwide weighing more than 100 tons. Several other shipping companies are using vessels harnessing wind power including Zephyr & Boree, Windcoop and Neoline. — AFP



MUSWELLBROOK, Australia: This photo taken on December 13, 2023 shows electricity lines near emission funnels for the Bayswater coal-powered thermal power station located near the central New South Wales town of Muswellbrook. — AFP

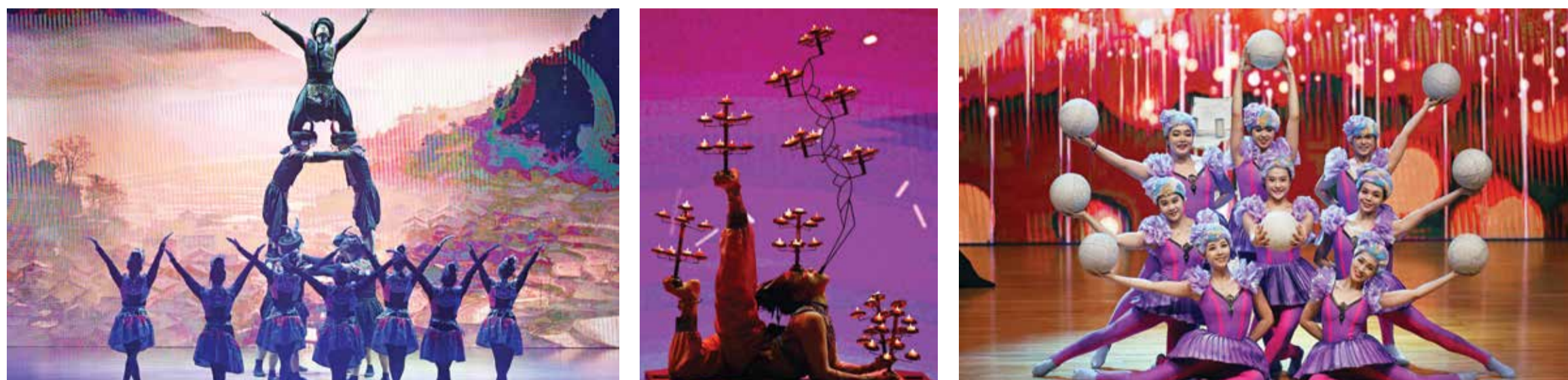
now, not in a decade, or two decades, to be certain that Australia's energy needs will be met." Buckley said that while Australia's investment in the sector was growing, it lagged behind other countries. "China has overtaken Australia in renewables. It is investing nearly a trillion Australian dollars (\$671 billion) a year in clean tech and when it comes to renewables," he said. "China is installing as much new renewable capacity in a week as Australia installs in a year."

Last week, Australia's energy regulator warned ongoing investment in the renewable energy market was needed to avoid blackouts in the coming decades as demand is projected to soar. — AFP

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024



Participants and officials gather on stage after the acrobatic show "A moonmoment to remember in Kuwait," organized by the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait and the Chinese Cultural Center, celebrating cultural exchanges between China and Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



CHINESE EMBASSY HOSTS GRAND CULTURAL SHOWCASE IN KUWAIT



Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei addresses the audience at the AUM Cultural Center, emphasizing the significance of cultural exchanges between China and Kuwait.

The Chinese Embassy in Kuwait with the cooperation of the Chinese Cultural Center held, on Tuesday, an acrobatic show entitled "A moonmoment to remember in Kuwait."

During his remarks, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei said "The Moon is always depicted as an image with distinctive meanings in both Arab Islamic and Chinese civilizations. For example, the Holy Quran recorded the miracle of splitting the moon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while the ancient Chinese myth of Chang'e flying to the moon is widely known in China. Held on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month in the Chinese calendar, the Mid-Autumn Festival is an important moment for the Chinese to gather with their families. It is a day marked by family reunions, eating moon cakes, and appreciating the full moon."

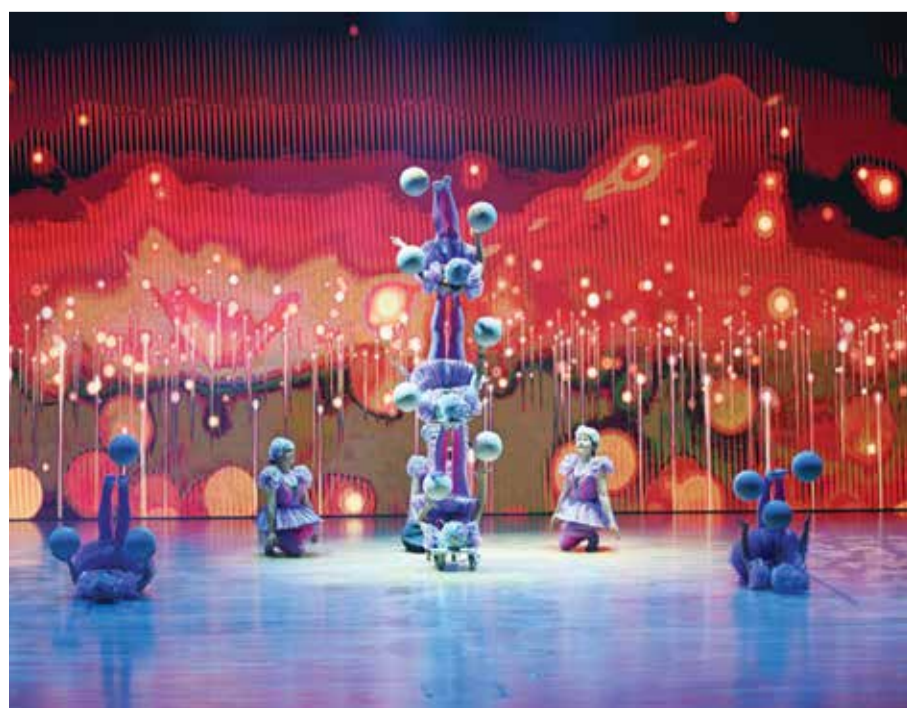
The Ambassador highlighted that cultural exchanges between China and Kuwait have enhanced mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples and given strong momentum to the progress of bilateral relations on all fronts, adding "We will present to our Kuwaiti friends the fine traditional Chinese culture by organizing various cultural exchange activities. This will promote understanding and cooperation and contribute to building a community with a shared future for mankind."

He added, "Though geographically far apart, the Chinese and Kuwaiti peoples have forged a profound friendship

and admired each other. The first China Cultural Center in the Gulf region was launched in Kuwait for trial operation last year. Since then, an array of wonderful events has been staged at the center, attracting many of the Kuwaiti people. As President Xi Jinping said, civilizations have become richer and more colorful with exchanges and mutual learning."



Chinese ambassador noted that his country desires to draw insight from various civilizations and is willing to promote exchanges and mutual learning between different countries, saying "This is the way to add impetus to the progress of human civilization. Going forward, we will continue to act on the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping and earnestly implement the important common understandings between the leaders of our two nations."



As wolves swoop, Austrians grab guns for contested cull



Wolves whelp play at the Wolf Science Center in Ernstbrunn.



Farmer Renate Pilz's flock of sheep in her cote in Arbesbach, Lower Austria.



Gerhard Fallent, chairman of the Wolfstop association, poses next to a wolf area warning sign in Arbesbach.

After wolves swooped from the forest and savaged her lambs, Austrian sheep farmer Renate Pilz feels like giving up. Others, to the anger of conservationists, are reaching for their rifles. "I lost two ewes and two lambs" to the wolf attack last year, the 55-year-old said at her farm in the village of Arbesbach. She showed AFP photos of her animals, bleeding and so badly bitten that they had to be put down. "It's too much work, it's no longer profitable and, above all, I don't want to do it any more," she said. After disappearing in the 19th century, wolves have gradually returned to Austria in recent years.

The number rose to 104 this year, up from an estimated 80 in 2022. In response to a reported increase in attacks on livestock, several Austrian regions have authorized the controversial killing of wolves. Environmental groups say the move violates European law, which lists them as protected animals. Swelling wolf populations have dominated the headlines in the Alpine country and stirred emotion across Europe, with breeding packs recorded in 23 countries of the European Union.

'Wolf-free' zones

A few kilometers from Arbesbach, Gerhard Fallent told AFP that three wolves had killed "half of his flock of sheep" and seriously injured the other half last year. Fallent has since become a vocal proponent of regulating the wolf population, founding the association Wolf Stop. He has called for "wolf-free" zones to be established near communities where people live and work. After a wolf was sighted close to a bus stop frequented by children, school trips were cancelled and pupils picked up directly from home by the bus for a year, the 64-year-old lamented.

"We want our children to be able to

go back to playing in the woods" in a region that can offer much to tourists too, said Fallent. With family farms going out of business, he noted that several Austrian regions managed to significantly reduce the number of attacks after authorizing killings.

'Obsolete' protection status

In Austria's southern state of Carinthia, shooting wolves to protect local

farms and their livestock has been authorized since 2022. So far "we have killed 13 wolves," deputy governor Martin Gruber told AFP. Putting up barriers such as fences in the rugged terrain, he argued, was "impossible" and above all a "waste of public money". With the total population of wolves in the EU estimated at 20,300, Gruber said the predator's protection status was "obsolete" and should be lowered.



Marianne Heberlein, Scientific Director of the Wolf Science Center, walks with wolf whelps in Ernstbrunn.

for the downgrading of the wolf's conservation status from "strictly protected" to "protected" in view of the "real danger" posed by the packs. But conservationists across Europe have been up in arms, with environmental groups in Austria challenging the authorized killings in court.

In July, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that Austria should first try other solutions before hunting

groups are linking up, said Marianne Heberlein, director of the Wolf Science Centre. The operation, which claims to be the only one of its kind in the world, is attached to Vienna's University of Veterinary Medicine.

It researches the process of domestication by comparing the behavior of the 10 wolves and 13 dogs housed at the center. It also aims to increase the public's awareness of wolves by famil-



A wolf is pictured in an enclosure at the Wolf Science Center.

wolves massively, noting the local wolf population was "not at a favorable conservation status" and siding with the conservationists.

Fairy tales

Situated in the heart of Europe, Austria is rare in having three isolated wolf populations converge there from other parts of the continent. After surviving "heavy hunting" about a century ago, wolves have started to spread due to being protected, and separate

iarizing people with the "wild animal" in a "neutral" way, said Heberlein. The center aims to do so "without glossing over the danger" they can pose or "giving them a bad image", she said. The fear of the wolf "goes back a very long way in history", she said - the age-old conflict between wolf and human has fed into the fairy tales told to children. — AFP



Farmer Anita Herzog's flock of sheep on the pasture in Arbesbach.



Gerhard Fallent, chairman of the Wolfstop association and his godchild Irmuun Munkhbayar walk with his sheep at his pasture in Langschlag, Lower Austria. — AFP photos

Rome's ancient Arch of Constantine damaged by lightning

Rome's ancient Arch of Constantine was hit by lightning during a heavy storm, causing some fragments to fall off, an official said Wednesday. "All the fragments were recovered and made safe" following the strike on Tuesday afternoon, a spokeswoman for the Colosseum archaeological park told AFP. "Damage assessments have already begun and analyses are continuing this morning with a works site already operational," she added. The arch, built in 315 to celebrate the victory of Emperor Constantine in the battle of Ponte Milvio, was already undergoing maintenance work, which had begun on Monday.



File picture shows a general view of a deserted area by the Arch of Constantine (left) and a closed Colosseum monument in Rome. - AFP

Standing about 25 meters high, it is the largest of the three triumphal arches still preserved in Rome. It is located along the route followed by triumphal processions, near the Colosseum. After a hot, dry summer, the center of Rome was hit on Tuesday afternoon by a sudden storm, bringing heavy rain, high winds, thunder and lightning.

More than 80 millimeters (3.1 inches) of rain per square meter fell on the historic center - about the same amount that falls on average in a month in autumn, the municipality said. The "downburst" caused floods and winds of up to 90 kilometers per hour (56mph) that brought down trees, it said. Experts say climate change is shifting weather patterns and increasing the number of extreme weather events. "It is increasingly evident that the issue of climate change and its impact on our lives is now unavoidable for everyone," said Rome mayor Roberto Gualtieri. — AFP

Rome mulls introducing tickets for the Trevi Fountain

Authorities in Rome said Wednesday they were mulling introducing a ticketing system for visitors to the iconic Trevi Fountain, in the latest attempt in Italy to tackle overtourism. The backdrop to the most famous scene in Federico Fellini's film "La Dolce Vita", when actress Anita Ekberg takes a dip, the 18th-century fountain is top of the list for many visitors exploring the Eternal City. "Personally I would be in favor of looking at a new form of access, limited and timed, to the Trevi Fountain," Alessandro Onorato, the city councillor responsible for tourism, told the Corriere della Sera newspaper.

This would be "a (ticket) reservation system - free for Romans and costing a symbolic one-euro for tourists", he said, in quotes confirmed by the municipality. The goal is not to raise money but control the crowds - including stopping them "eating ice cream or pizza on a monument that deserves the proper respect", he said. As a result of the fountain's fame, the crowds in the square surrounding the Baroque masterpiece are often so deep that it is hard to get a proper look. A spokesman for the municipality told AFP the ticket proposal was merely "an initial idea - there is nothing concrete yet".

"It is a delicate, difficult issue, but sooner or later it must be addressed," he said. "Tourism in Rome, which is reporting record numbers, must be made sustainable for the city and the environ-

ment." Visitor numbers are expected to surge further in 2025 for the Jubilee, a holy year held by the Catholic Church around once every 25 years, with some 30 million people expected in Rome and the Vatican over the 12 months. Venice earlier this year trialled a five-euro (\$5.50) ticket for day visitors during peak periods, in a bid to encourage people to come at less busy times.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government is also considering hiking the nightly tourist tax, although the

proposal has sparked anger among industry groups who warn against scaring people away. Onorato said Rome authorities would also like to limit the opening of new bed-and-breakfast or holiday homes to reduce the pressure on the historic center, but they do not have the power. "Today we can limit the number of restaurants or fast-food outlets in the historic center, but we cannot prevent the opening of non-hotel facilities," he said. — AFP



Tourists refresh themselves at the Trevi Fountain during a heatwave in Rome on August 21, 2023. — AFP

Lifestyle

Lady Gaga-mania as 'Joker' sequel brings pop star to Venice

Lady Gaga is the hotly anticipated attraction on the glitzy Lido Wednesday, as the Venice Film Festival hosts the premiere of her new film, the dark and subversive "Joker: Folie a Deux". The pop sensation's



Actress and singer Lady Gaga and US actor Joaquin Phoenix attend the photocall of the movie 'Joker: Folie a deux'.

appearance in Venice could eclipse even that of George Clooney and Brad Pitt, whose red carpet hijinks in front of fans Sunday ahead of the premiere of their film "Wolfs" were a highlight of the prestigious festival. Subverting the

codes of the superhero film, 2019's "Joker" from US director Todd Phillips saw Joaquin Phoenix as Arthur Fleck, a failed stand-up comic descending into mental illness. The film - loosely based on the DC Comics characters and set in a gritty Gotham City - was wildly successful, grossing \$1 billion at the box office but sparking criticism for its nihilistic violence.

After winning the Golden Lion at Venice, it went on to win a Best Actor Oscar for Phoenix. But Lady Gaga is the new star addition in Phillips' sequel, bringing the US singer back to the big screen after 2021's "House of Gucci". She plays the Joker's partner in crime and love interest, Harley Quinn, whom Fleck meets while awaiting trial for his past crimes. "He's not sick. He's perfect," her character is heard saying in voice-over in a short teaser for the film released this week.

Phillips has said that for the sequel, he wanted to explore the idea of identity, asking the question "where does the music inside him (Fleck) come from?" "If we were going to do it, we knew we had to swing for the fences;

we wanted to create something as crazy and fearless as Joker himself," Phillips said. On Wednesday, the "Bad Romance" singer is expected to participate in a press conference with Phoenix and other cast members, before her red-carpet appearance and the film's world premiere in the evening. "Joker: Folie a Deux" is one of 21 films vying for the top prize, the Golden Lion, at the world's oldest film festival known as "La Mostra". This year's event has been awash in Hollywood pizzazz, with a long roster of A-listers taking a twirl on the red carpet, from Daniel Craig and Angelina Jolie to Nicole Kidman and Michael Keaton. The festival ends on Saturday. — AFP

Actress and singer Lady Gaga, director Todd Phillips (center) and US actor Joaquin Phoenix attend the photocall of the movie 'Joker: Folie a deux' presented in competition during the 81st International Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido, on September 4, 2024. — AFP photos



Indian National Congress (INC) party workers wear masks of celebrities from the country's Kerala-based Mollywood film industry during a protest against the government's action over alleged sexual allegations within the industry, in Kochi on August 30, 2024.

India's 'Mollywood' cinema rocked by MeToo abuse claims

Terrified for her safety, Indian actress Sreelekha Mitra remembers pushing chairs and a sofa against her hotel door after she said an award-winning veteran director sexually harassed her. Mitra waited 15 years to speak out about the incident, one of several cases exposing the dark underbelly of India's Malayalam-language "Mollywood" film industry that has won awards at Cannes. Her revelation was spurred by an explosive government report documenting widespread sexual harassment in an industry dominated by powerful and wealthy men who believe that an actress willing to kiss on screen would do the same in real life. "That entire night I stayed awake," Mitra, 51, told AFP.



A man rides past posters of regional movies from India's Kerala-based Mollywood film industry, displayed along a street amid protests against alleged sexual allegations within the industry, in Kochi. — AFP photos

winner of the Camera d'Or at Cannes. This year's "Manjummel Boys", a survival thriller, took \$29 million at the box office, the highest-grossing Malayalam movie ever and the fifth-most successful in India this year.

'Worst evil'

The industry report, released August 19, said women actors faced the widespread "worst evil" of sexual harassment. The report was released by the Hema Committee, headed by a former high court judge, set up after a leading Malayalam actress reported she was sexually assaulted in 2017. Gopalakrishnan Padmanabhan, a prominent Malayalam actor better known by his stage name Dileep, was arrested for allegedly orchestrating the assault. He was imprisoned for three months before being released on bail. The case continues.

But the release of the report has opened discussion on the far wider issue of chronic violence against women, encouraging people like Mitra to speak out in public for the first time. It said that women who considered speaking out about sexual assault were silenced by threats to their life, and to their families. Award-winning actress Parvathy Thiruvothu, 36, called the investigation a "game changer" and a "historic moment". "There was this idea that women working in the industry should feel grateful for having been given an opportunity by the men who were hiring them," said Thiruvothu, a member of the campaign group Women in Cinema Collective.

'Shaking everything'

Allegations of abuse in Indian cinema are not new. It witnessed a wave in 2018, shortly after the 2017 MeToo movement erupted in Hollywood against disgraced US movie producer Harvey Weinstein. But Thiruvothu called the latest allegations more than "MeToo Part Two." "It's shaking everything," she told AFP. "It isn't an individual-to-individual complaint anymore. It's about a systemic structure that has continued to fail women." Since the report, several top actors have been accused.

The Association of Malayalam Movie Artists was dissolved following the resignation of its chief on "moral grounds" with some members among the accused. Ranjith Balakrishnan, 59, chairman of the state's film academy, has also quit. Balakrishnan, who denies any wrongdoing, was the man Mitra accused of sexual harassment. Police have filed a case against him for outraging a woman's modesty, a non-bailable offence. — AFP

Mitra was invited to a gathering at the director's house, where she said he lured her into his room for a phone call with a cinematographer. "He started playing with my hair and neck... I knew if I did not say anything then, his hand would roam around other parts of my body," she said, describing events from 2009, when she was 36. She left and returned to her hotel. "The intentions behind his moves were pretty clear to me... I was petrified." Her case and close to a dozen others have triggered a MeToo reckoning in the industry, with at least 10 prominent figures accused, according to Indian media.

Kerala-based Mollywood is known for critically acclaimed movies with strong and progressive themes, a change from the big dance and song numbers of India's giant Hindi-language Bollywood in Mumbai. The industry is prolific, producing up to 200 films a year, loved not only by southern India's 37 million Malayalam speakers, but also dubbed and streamed across the rest of India — and abroad.

Internationally, its films have won awards, including the 1999 satire Marana Simhasanam ("Throne of Death"),

Shakira compares Spanish tax office to 'Inquisition'

Colombian pop star Shakira accused Spain's tax office of confiscating all the income she earned when she lived there, comparing the institution to "the Inquisition" in a letter published Wednesday in Spanish daily El Mundo. The "Hips Don't Lie" singer reached a settlement in 2023 to avoid a trial in Barcelona over alleged tax fraud. "The Spanish state kept more than all my income for those years," she wrote in her letter to El Mundo.

"It may seem incomprehensible, but for me, the Spanish decade was a lost decade financially, and not because I worked little, as everyone knows," she added. Shakira settled with prosecutors on the opening day of her trial in Barcelona in November 2023 over charges she had defrauded tax authorities of 14.5 million euros (\$16 million) earned between 2012 and 2014. As part of the deal, she accepted the charges in exchange for paying a fine of nearly 7.8 million euros to avoid serving time in jail.

At the time she explained she had settled "with the best interest of my kids at heart". She needed "to move past the stress and emotional toll of the last several years" and focus on her career, she said. In May 2024 a Spanish court said it had shelved a second probe into alleged tax fraud by Shakira concerning her 2018 income tax return, ending her legal problems in Spain. Shakira now lives in Miami with her two sons after splitting from star footballer Gerard Pique, who at the time played for Barcelona.

A public 'burning'

In her letter to El Mundo, she accused Spain's tax office of being more interested in "burning her in public" than listening to her arguments. "You don't solve things by burning people at

that she had in fact been in Spain for over 183 days per year. Its lawyers summoned dozens of witnesses, including her hairdresser and neighbors to back their case. Spain has in recent years cracked down on celebrities such



Colombian singer Shakira (center) leaves the High Court of Justice of Catalonia after attending her trial on tax fraud, in Barcelona on November 20, 2023. — AFP

the stake like in an Inquisition trial," the 47-year-old added. As she had argued to the court, the singer once again denied that she lived in Spain for more than 183 days a year between 2012 and 2014, the threshold above which a person is considered a taxable resident.

Spain's tax office went through her social media posts to gather evidence

as Argentine football star Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, for unpaid taxes. Both players were convicted of evasion and received prison sentences that were waived for first-time offenders. —AFP

Steve McQueen WWII drama 'Blitz' to kick off London Film Fest

The London Film Festival returns next month with the premiere of Steve McQueen's wartime drama "Blitz", as well as the first look at a new television series from "Peaky Blinders" creator Steven Knight, the organizers said Wednesday. Oscar-winner McQueen's World War II drama will open the 12-day festival on October 9 - the third time the British director of "Hunger" and "12 Years a Slave" is kicking off the annual event. Festival director Kristy Matheson said his latest movie - "an expansive tapestry of British life during the Second World War" - was the perfect choice to begin with.



British director Steve McQueen will open the London Film Festival with his World War II drama 'Blitz'. — AFP

"It's an incredibly visually dazzling film," she told a launch event at the British Film Institute (BFI)'s central London base. "It really represents the finest portrayals of life in a moment of crisis, perseverance and renewal." The festival is also getting the first glimpse of "A Thousand Blows", the new TV series from Knight starring British actor Stephen Graham. Due to air next year on streaming platform Disney+ in the UK and elsewhere, and Hulu in the United States, it is set in the world of illegal boxing in 1880s London.

Matheson said the "exhilarating" drama captured the underbelly of the Victorian capital and features a "towering performance" from Graham. The London festival will also host the world premiere of "Joy", which tells the true story of the three British pioneers behind the world's first IVF baby starring Bill Nighy and James Norton.

Silent Sherlock

While not among Europe's top-tier film festivals, London has a reputation for eclectic programming and celebrating established and emerging British talent. It will close on October 20 with the European premiere of "Piece By Piece", a new animated film by Oscar winner Morgan Neville about the life of musician Pharrell Williams, who is among its producers. Chronicling his childhood in Virginia and subsequent rise to fame entirely using Lego, it debuted to critical acclaim at the recent Telluride Film Festival.

The BFI will also unveil a newly-restored silent Sherlock Holmes film from 1922, starring creator Arthur Conan Doyle's favorite impersonator of the famous fictional detective, Eille Norwood. It will be screened for the first time since its release in the dramatic Victorian setting of Alexandra Palace in north London with a live score.

Another BFI restoration of one of the UK's greatest animated films, Martin Rosen's 1978 classic "Watership Down", will also premiere at the festival. Other highlights include the European premiere of "Elton John: Never Too Late", a new documentary by directors R.J. Cutler and the singer's husband David Furnish following the British music icon on his US tour. — AFP

'Ketamine queen,' doctor to face March trial in Matthew Perry death

A California doctor and a woman charged with illegally supplying the drug ketamine to "Friends" star Matthew Perry before his overdose death will face trial in March, according to court documents released on Tuesday. Dr. Salvador Plasencia, and Jasveen Sangha, whom authorities said was a drug dealer known to customers as the "ketamine queen," have pleaded not guilty to charges related to the October 2023 death of Perry.

An autopsy determined that the 54-year-old died from "acute effects" of ketamine and other factors that caused him to lose consciousness and drown in his hot tub. Ketamine is a short-acting anesthetic with hallucinogenic properties, sometimes prescribed to treat depression and anxiety but also abused by recreational users.

Perry had publicly acknowledged decades of substance abuse, including during the years he starred as Chandler Bing on the hit 1990s television sitcom "Friends." Plasencia and Sangha are scheduled to be tried together in federal court in Los Angeles starting on March 4. Three other defendants have agreed to plead guilty in connection with Perry's death. — Reuters

Sports

'Embarrassing' Pakistan cricket hits rock bottom with Bangladesh defeats

It's a huge setback and our cricket is at a crossroads: Wasim Akram

KARACHI: Pakistan cricket was reeling Wednesday after its first-ever Test defeats against Bangladesh, the latest in a string of poor performances which have seen the game hit rock bottom. The cricket-mad nation was left in despair after losing the second Test in Rawalpindi by six wickets on Tuesday as Bangladesh swept the series 2-0.

It was the 10th winless home Test in a row for former powerhouses Pakistan and came hard on the heels of failing to get out of their groups at both the 50-over and T20 World Cups in the past year. "It's a huge setback and our cricket is at a crossroads," former Pakistan captain and legendary fast bowler Wasim Akram told AFP. "For a former player and captain, and a lover of the game, I was left embarrassed at the way they have lost from good positions. I simply don't get it."

"We are losing consistently on home turf and that says a lot about the quality of our cricket," added Akram, who played 104 Tests and 356 one-day internationals for Pakistan. The defeat to Bangladesh comes hard on the heels of chastening losses against Afghanistan and the USA in the ODI and T20 World Cups respectively.

Dismal record

Pakistan also have a dismal record in Tests at home in the past three years—six defeats and four draws, including England's first-ever 3-0 series sweep there in 2022. Ominously, in-form England are Pakistan's next visitors and will play three Tests beginning in Multan on October 7.

Pakistan are not faring any better away from home, they lost all three Tests in Australia earlier this year — their sixth successive whitewash there since 1999. "People have started to hate

cricket," former international player and regional coach Basit Ali told AFP.

"Bangladesh has shown us the mirror of what we are at international level. 'It's a cliché that wins and losses are part of the game, but this is a seismic shock.' Ali, who played 19 Tests and 50 ODIs for Pakistan, echoed the consensus among fans and commentators that the international team seems disjointed on the field. "Pakistan did not play as a unit and players looked scattered," he said. "It is sad and embarrassing to say that this is Pakistan's team."

The loss also saw the Pakistan side battered by the national press, which said disunity stemmed from problems at the very top. "Pakistan team's rapid downward spiral has been alarming, to say the least," said the Express Tribune newspaper on Wednesday. The sequence of high-profile losses "makes the mind boggle", it added.

'No quick fix'

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is currently chaired by the country's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi. "Since 1998, hand-picked favourites of the respective ruling regimes in the country have taken turns as PCB chairmen to run the game in their own clueless manner, only to ruin it," the Express Tribune said.

Other analysts also say frequent changes at the top of the PCB, which has had five chairmen in the past three years, have impeded progress. "With the PCB's top management changing with every change of guard at political level, there is has been no consistent framework," said the Dawn newspaper.

There have also been constant switches of captains and coaching staff while the domestic system of tournaments has had countless overhauls. PCB



RAWALPINDI: Pakistan's Khurram Shahzad (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Shadman Islam during the fifth and final day of the second and last Test cricket match between Pakistan and Bangladesh. — AFP

chairman Naqvi himself called for "surgery in the system" after the T20 World Cup exit.

"We need to fix our problems," he said last month. "But when we look at how to resolve them, we don't have any solid data or player pool which we can draw from." Ex-skipper Akram echoed Naqvi's

analysis. "The quality of our cricket has gone down with no grassroots activity, so we do not have proper back-ups," he said.

"We have a lot to work on," Akram said. "As a cricket nation we have to be patient, that's the key." "Unfortunately, there is no quick fix." — AFP

Breaker 'Raygun' defends her record

SYDNEY: Australian Rachael "Raygun" Gunn has defended her breakdancing skills and suggested much of the criticism she received for her performance at the Paris Olympics last month was born of ignorance of the sport.

Gunn became an overnight sensation after losing all three of her round robin battles by a combined score of 54-0 when breaking made its Olympic debut at the Place de la Concorde. The university lecturer was mocked online and in the mainstream media for everything from her moves to her green official team uniform in a frenzy of criticism she described as "alarming".

The 37-year-old said she knew the odds were against her going into the competition but maintained she was the best female breaker in Australia. "I think my record speaks to that," she told Australia's Channel 10 TV in her first interview since the Games.

"I was the top ranked Australian B girl in 2020 and 2022, and 2023 ... so the record is there. But anything can happen in a battle." Gunn said she had received plenty of support as well as the brickbats but admitted it was sad to hear criticism from other Australian breakers.

Argentine court allows rape-accused rugby players to return home

BUENOS AIRES: Two French rugby players held in Argentina for almost two months on rape charges headed home Tuesday after a court allowed them to return to France pending the conclusion of their case. Hugo Auradou and Oscar Jegou arrived at Buenos Aires airport on Tuesday evening and headed for passport control without speaking to the press.

The players were due to board a flight to Paris shortly before midnight and were expected to arrive on Wednesday at 5:45 pm (15:45 GMT), their lawyer Rafael Cuneo Libarona said. Earlier in the day a court in Mendoza, about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) west of the capital Buenos Aires, ruled that the duo can leave the country "from this moment," it said in a statement.

The prosecution had recommended that the players be allowed to travel because the accusation had "lost its initial force." Jegou and Auradou, both 21, were arrested in July, two days after winning their first international caps against Argentina in Mendoza.

They were charged with the aggravated rape of a 39-year-old woman who alleged they viciously assaulted her in a hotel room after a nightout following the match. The men deny the accusation, saying sex with the woman had been consensual.

They were released from detention into house arrest on July 17, and freed under supervision last

Iranian 2.46m para volleyballer struggles to find big bed

PARIS: Iran's sitting volleyball star Morteza Mehrzad has finally found a bed big enough to accommodate his 2.46-metre (8 ft 0.85 in) frame at the Paris Paralympics. His coach Hadi Rezaeigarkani told the Olympics.com website last Friday that the 36-year-old was planning to sleep on the floor of the Olympic Village because — unlike during the last Games in Tokyo — his bed wasn't big enough.

"In Tokyo, they have made a special bed, but un-

"I am very sorry for the backlash that the community has experienced, but I can't control how people react," she added. "Unfortunately, we just need some more resources in Australia for us to have a chance to be world champions."

"In the last year, I have trained my hardest ... I have really put my body through it, put my mind through it. But if that's not good enough for someone, what can I say?" Gunn said a lot of the criticism came from people who just did not understand the different styles of breaking and what she was trying to achieve in the competition.

"It was really sad how much hate that it did evoke," she said. "And a lot of the responses is also just due to people not being very familiar with breaking and the diversity of approaches in breaking. "(But) the energy and vitriol that people had was pretty alarming." An online petition accusing Gunn of manipulating the qualification procedure to earn her Paris spot attracted 50,000 signatures before it was removed at the request of the Australian Olympic Committee.

"The conspiracy theories were just awful," Gunn said. "That was really upsetting, because it wasn't just people that didn't understand breaking and were just angry about my performance. "It was people that are now attacking our reputation and our integrity. And none of them were grounded in any kind of facts. People still don't believe the truth, but ... I think that's just going to be part of our reality, unfortunately."

month. The pair were allowed to travel from Mendoza to Buenos Aires last week pending a hearing into a request for the charges to be dropped.

A date for that hearing has yet to be set. Tuesday's ruling requires the pair to "appear if they are summoned to the Argentine consulate in France," to report virtually "as often as required," or return "to appear in Mendoza if requested." A judge also rejected a request from the accuser for further psychological examinations of the rugby players.

'Like a brute'

Late Tuesday, the plaintiff gave an account to the press of what she said happened the night she met Auradou in a nightclub in Mendoza. "When he asked me to go and have a drink at his hotel, I said yes," she told journalists from France 2's Envoyé Spécial, in clips released ahead of the program's September 12 broadcast. Once in the hotel room, she said she asked to leave, but alleged the rugby player prevented her from doing so. "He grabbed my neck. He put me on the bed. He stripped me like a brute," she said, before choking her "so that I had no oxygen left". "I tried to react by slapping him. Instead of stopping him, this slap only encouraged him to carry on." According to the complainant, Jegou then entered the room. But instead of helping her as she believed he would, she alleges he went on to assault her as well.

'Joy and relief'

The French Rugby Federation (FFR) welcomed Tuesday's ruling, and underscored the men must be considered innocent until proven otherwise. Auradou's club in the French city of Pau expressed "joy and relief" at the news that he would be returning home.

fortunately not here," Rezaeigarkani said. "He's going to lie on the floor." Mehrzad, the second-tallest living man in the world, was diagnosed at a young age with acromegaly, a rare condition that leads to the production of excessive growth hormones.

All athletes in the village are sleeping on the same sort of eco-friendly and modifiable beds used at the Tokyo Olympics, which have mattresses made from recycled plastic and bases manufactured from cardboard.

The Paris organizing committee told AFP in a statement that they had initially provided two extensions for Mehrzad at the request of the Iranian Paralympic Committee. "A third was later requested by the Iranian Paralympic Committee which has also been supplied to them," the statement said. "Paris 2024 is in contact with the Iranian Paralympic Committee and the athlete now has



Rachael Gunn

Gunn said she was unlikely to be competing again anytime soon but was confident she would come through her Paris experience relatively unscathed. "I'll survive, I'm all right," she concluded. "I would rather much focus on the positives out of this, and the positive responses and the joy that I brought people." — Reuters



EZEIZA: French rugby players Hugo Auradou (L) and Oscar Jegou (R) and their lawyer Rafael Cuneo Libarona (C), walk before taking a flight to France at the Ezeiza International Airport. — AFP

According to the complainant's lawyer, Natacha Romano, her client suffered injuries to her face, back, breasts, legs and ribs, as well as bite and scratch marks. Defense lawyers have pointed to witnesses and cameras allegedly detecting no injuries to the woman as she left the hotel. — AFP

all necessary equipment for his comfort."

Mehrzad joined Iran's national sitting volleyball team after the coach spotted him on a reality TV show about people grappling with difficulties in their lives. During his teenage years, he had a bicycle accident which injured his pelvis and stunted the growth of his right leg.

He won gold medals in the 2016 and 2020 Summer Paralympics and earned the Gold Ball for the world's best player in 2019, 2021 and 2022. The beds at the Paris and Tokyo Olympics have frequently hit headlines, with reports claiming they were "anti-sex" because they had been designed to be too flimsy to support the weight of two adults.

Many athletes have since debunked the suggestion by posting videos of themselves jumping on the beds which are sturdy enough to support the weight of several people. — AFP



Quan Hongchan

Medals and mobs: China's 'toxic' sports fans face crackdown

BEIJING: Crowds descended on the home of 17-year-old Chinese diver Quan Hongchan after she won two golds at the Paris Olympics while gymnast Zhang Boheng hid in a Beijing airport toilet to escape overzealous throngs of fans.

They are just two recent examples of what state media are calling "toxic fandom" and Chinese authorities have vowed to crack down on it. Some of the adulation towards China's sports stars has been more sinister — fans obsessing over athletes' personal lives, cyberbullying opponents or slamming supposedly crooked judges.

Experts say it mirrors the kind of behavior once reserved for entertainment celebrities, before China's ruling Communist Party moved to rein in the fanatical hype surrounding them. Quan has been the focus of intense interest since winning two Olympic diving titles at the Paris Games, adding to the gold she took home from the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021.

Such is the clamor surrounding her, with people mobbing her hometown in rural Guangdong, that she avoided going home. This week, as China's Olympic team made a visit to Macau, Quan was photographed in tears after being overwhelmed by fans at her hotel.

Online abuse

Jian Xu, an expert on Chinese celebrity studies at Deakin University in Australia, said that China's sports stars have increasingly appeared on television shows and in livestreams, turning them into celebrities. Jian called it the commercialization and "entertainmentization" of China's athletes.

But there is a flip-side. While some athletes have been feted as national heroes, others have suffered at the hands of trolls online. Gymnast Su Weide, 24, received online abuse after he fell twice during his horizontal bar routine at the Paris Olympics.

"He dragged the whole team down on his own," read one comment on the Twitter-like Weibo, while others accused him of gaining his place on the team through "connections" rather than talent. In the all-Chinese women's table tennis final between Chen Meng and Sun Yingsha, Sun received vocal support in the arena and online, while Chen was booed and abused on social media.

"The whole country was hoping for Sun Yingsha to win the women's singles gold, where's your sense of justice?" one Weibo comment aimed at the winner Chen read. Days later, China's Ministry of Public Security announced the arrest of one abusive online fan.

Since then at least five people have been detained or punished for targeting China's athletes or coaches, part of the move to deal with abusive fans and fan groups. Pan Zhanle, the 20-year-old swimmer who broke the 100m freestyle world record on his way to gold in Paris, disbanded his official fan circle on Weibo just weeks after his triumph. — AFP

Sports

Paralympic fencer Gilliver's travels have a silver lining

Fencers had a much longer day than expected as event fell behind by over two hours

PARIS: British fencer Piers Gilliver said he was "gutted" to have to settle for silver in the men's Paralympic sabre but admitted it was "great even just to be here competing" after struggling with serious concussion last year.

The 29-year-old equated his concussion — due to a clash of heads with an epee sparring partner — to severe jetlag, leaving him unable to concentrate properly. He found it impossible to carry on a conversation or even to get through watching a film because he had forgotten what had happened earlier.

Gilliver — who won the epee title in Tokyo in 2021 to become Britain's first Paralympic fencing champion since Carol Walton in 1988 — recovered well enough to be crowned world epee champion later in 2023. Sabre is relatively new to his box of tricks but he held his nerve in beating Tokyo silver medallist Artem Manco of Ukraine 15-14 in Tuesday's semi-finals in the magnificent surroundings of the Grand Palais, before losing to Germany's Martin Schmidt 15-8 in the final.

All the fencers had a much longer day than expected as the event fell behind by over two hours — spectators for the day session had to be asked to move to other seats to accommodate those for the evening one. Despite Gilliver finally appearing for his final at 11:00pm (2100 GMT) — it had been scheduled for 9:40pm — the stands were still full of spectators, including his parents and girlfriend. "It's been a really tough cycle," the Briton said.

"The last couple of years have been some of the hardest points of my life and there are points where I've questioned all sorts of things. There have been a lot of challenges and it's been a tough one to get

through, so it's great to be able to even be here competing, to be honest."

'Never-ending maze'

Gilliver, who unlike some of his opponents is confined to a wheelchair owing to the consequences of suffering from Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a rare condition that affects connective tissue, said the concussion on top of other setbacks had left him feeling low. The fencers are seated close together — their wheelchairs are fixed to the ground by metal frames and the chair is clamped to both sides of the frame to keep it from tipping, meaning there is a risk of a clash of heads.

"Someone's head connecting with yours is not something you can avoid," he said. Had Gilliver, who defends his epee title later in the week, stepped away from the sport, he at least has a business interest to fall back on — an antique shop in Bath, southwest England, specializing in World War I and World War II artefacts.

"Ever since I was a kid I've always loved history and I think it's quite important to have something on the side alongside sport," he said. "Because I think sport can really be all-consuming where you train long hours, so much more than 9-5 ever would be."

"You get home and you're still just obsessed about it and you just can't stop thinking about how to make yourself better and better." Gilliver, who took up fencing in 2010 as his mobility declined, said his interests were not limited to the memorabilia linked to wars.

"I think the beauty about history is it's all about different stories and you can pick different sec-



PARIS: Britain's Piers Gilliver celebrates his victory after defeating Ukraine's Artem Manco during the semi-final wheelchair fencing men's Sabre Category A during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at the Grand Palais, in Paris. — AFP

tions," he said. "I think even with that it's a never-ending maze, there's always something interesting." He had come across one very special item, an original, unpublished photograph from the ill-fated liner Titanic, which he found among some mili-

tary-based postcards. However, if any of the many Titanic memorabilia hunters are keen to get their hands on it, they are likely to be disappointed. "I'm still holding onto it and likely to for a very long time," he said, laughing. — AFP

Fans give Nepal's Paralympic medallist a hero's welcome

KATHMANDU: Nepal gave their first Paralympic medallist a hero's welcome Wednesday as cheering crowds turned out for taekwondo star Palesha Goverdhan's return home. Goverdhan, 21, took bronze at the 2024 Paralympics in Paris, the first Games podium place in history for the Himalayan nation who have also never won a medal at the Olympics.

"I kept my promise, I brought a medal back home. This achievement is not just for me, but for everyone," Goverdhan said in a speech after her arrival. She said it had been a "long wait" for Nepal to win a medal.

"It was thought to be impossible... I believe that now young taekwondo players and other players can see it is possible," she said. Traditional music and an army band played as Goverdhan, draped in the national flag, marigold garlands and traditional Buddhist scarves, emerged to loud cheers at Kathmandu's airport.

Many young taekwondo athletes were among hundreds gathered to welcome back Goverdhan, who beamed a wide smile and held up her medal. "I am very happy, very inspired and proud for

the country," said 13-year-old taekwondo athlete Nandani Adhikari, who was among the crowds at the airport.

"Her victory feels like our own," she said. Goverdhan, who is studying architectural engineering in China, won bronze in the women's K44-57kg para taekwondo category when she beat Serbia's Marija Micev 15-8. Born with a congenital limb deficiency on her left hand, Goverdhan took up martial arts at school when she was 10 years old.

'So proud'

Her father Pradeep Goverdhan said her coach spotted her talent and suggested she train professionally. "She has made us so proud. As parents, you are worried when your child is born with a deficiency like that. But we always encouraged her," he said.

"As a child, she was always very determined, worked hard and achieved anything if her heart was set on it." Sugam Bhattarai, from Nepal's National Federation of the Disabled, said he hoped the victory would help others achieve their goals.

"Her achievement has not only brought glory to Nepal but has also shined a spotlight on the potential of para athletes in a country where para sports have often been underfunded and overlooked," he said. "I hope it will encourage investment in para sports. It is the same national flag, no matter who raises it," he said. Goverdhan became the first Nepali athlete to win a medal at the Asian Para Games with a bronze in 2022. She won gold at the Asian



KATHMANDU: Paris 2024 Paralympic Games taekwondo bronze medallist Palesha Goverdhan (C) holds her medal upon her arrival at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on September 4, 2024. — AFP

Youth Para Games the year before. She also won the bronze medal in the 2018 Asian Para Taekwondo Championship in Vietnam.

Goverdhan finished fifth at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games and said in interviews before Paris she was "aiming for gold". "I am filled with immense pride for having achieved this victory for our beloved nation," Goverdhan said on social media.

"The countless hours of hard work and dedication have truly paid off, and the feeling is simply overwhelming." — AFP

What to look out for in the UEFA Nations League

PARIS: International football returns across Europe this week, less than eight weeks after Spain edged out England in the Euro 2024 final in Berlin. AFP Sport picks out five storylines to follow around the continent ahead of two rounds of fixtures over six days starting Thursday:

Will Spain pick up where they left off?

Spain are on a high after their magnificent triumph at the Euros and their gold medal success at the Olympics. Luis de la Fuente's side are quickly back in action and have another title to defend, having won the last edition of the Nations League. La Roja are in Group 4 of League A and begin with an awkward double-header, a trip to Serbia being followed by a meeting with Switzerland in Geneva. Denmark complete the group. Their squad does not feature the injured Alvaro Morata, Unai Simon or Mikel Merino, who all played in the

Euros final, but wing stars Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams are involved. There are also new faces in Oscar Mingueza, the ex-Barcelona right-back now at Celta Vigo, and Valencia midfielder Pepelu. "We will keep fighting and trying to go as far as possible in every competition," insisted De la Fuente.

England start post-Southgate era

After missing out on Euros glory, England begin a new era with Gareth Southgate having stepped down. He has been replaced on an interim basis by Lee Carsley, the England Under-21 coach. Carsley, 50, is for now only in charge for this double-header of Nations League matches, as England play Ireland in Dublin and host Finland at Wembley. The English Football Association are buying themselves time as they search for a permanent successor to Southgate, with 2026 World Cup qualifying not beginning until next March. But a good start may see them keep faith in Carsley for the rest of the Nations League campaign, in which England also play Greece after being relegated from the top-tier League A following the last edition. Carsley's first squad is missing the injured Jude Bellingham, but there are call-ups for



BURTON UPON TRENT: England's midfielder Angel Gomes (C) takes part in a team training session at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, central England, on September 4, 2024 ahead of their UEFA Nations League League B. — AFP

the uncapped quartet of Noni Madueke, Morgan Gibbs-White, Tino Livramento and Angel Gomes.

Cristiano Ronaldo endured a disappointing Euro 2024, failing to score in five matches as Portugal went out in the quarter-finals. Many thought the 39-year-old might then accept it was time to retire, but coach Roberto Martinez has continued to back the former

Real Madrid striker, naming him in the latest squad. "When the time comes, I'll move on," Ronaldo, of Saudi club Al-Nassr, insisted on Monday after teaming up with the squad to play Croatia and Scotland at home. Portugal will also come up against Poland in Group 1 of League A, as they aim to win the Nations League for the second time after triumphing in 2019. — AFP

Japan must focus on positives ahead of WCup qualifiers

SAITAMA: Japan were stung by their quarter-final exit at the Asian Cup earlier this year but midfielder Wataru Endo says they must not dwell on that setback and instead go into 2026 World Cup qualifiers against China and Bahrain with a positive mindset.

Japan host China at Saitama Stadium on Thursday as the third round of qualifying gets underway, seeking to bounce back from the Asian Cup in Qatar where defeat to Iran ended their hopes of a record-extending fifth title.

While Japan are strong favourites to finish in the top two in Group C, which also features Australia, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, Endo said they are taking nothing for granted. "The Asian qualifiers are not easy games, we found that out at the Asian Cup," he said.

"The Asian qualifiers will be a long journey and there will be tough games along the way. "But we don't want to think about the negative things in the past. We have to think about the more positive things. We can play as a team and overcome these difficulties as well," the Liverpool player added.

Should Japan, who are attempting to qualify for an eighth consecutive World Cup, fail to land one of the two automatic spots from Group C, finishing third or fourth would extend their campaign into another round of preliminaries.

Japan have a track record of starting slowly at this stage and were beaten 1-0 by Branko Ivankovic's Oman in their first game of the final round of qualifiers for Qatar 2022. The Croatian will be in the opposing dugout on Thursday after his appointment by the Chinese earlier this year and Endo is wary of the wily 70-year-old, who also masterminded a win over the Japanese when in charge of Iran in 2005.

"He knows how to play against Japan," said Endo. "He knows how to analyse us and has good tactics against Japan as we've seen from past games. "For me, I need to manage the risks coming from the attacking players of the Chinese team and I know they have some tall and strong players that we need to take care of as well." — Reuters

Classifieds

Clinics

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

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

Change of Name

I, **SHAJI JOBY**, holder of Indian Passport No P1094284 having permanent address 42/827 Thekkiniyath house, Chiyaram P.O 680026 Thrissur Kerala, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Shaji and (surname) Varghese. (#5917 05/09/2024)

I, **Safdar** Faruq Ahmed, holder of Indian Passport No. W0778014, having permanent address at Arathi, Taluka Shriwardhan, Dist: Raigad, Maharashtra - 402110, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Safdar Faruq Ahmed and (surname) Khamkar. (#6162 03/09/2024)

I, **Munira**, holder of Indian Passport No. M9152772, having permanent address of Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Munira and (surname) Master. (#5916 03/09/2024)

Paralympic legends Masters and Storey light up Games

Host nation France surpass number of gold medals won in Tokyo



PARIS: Silver medallist, Turkey's Abdullah Kayapinar (L), Gold medallist Jordan's Omar Sami Hamadeh Qarada (C) and Bronze medallist Vietnam's Le Van Cong (R) celebrate during the victory ceremony for the para powerlifting men's up to 49kg final event at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at La Chapelle Arena in Paris on September 4, 2024. — AFP

PARIS: US cyclist Oksana Masters and British Paralympic great Sarah Storey added to their title hauls in early action on Wednesday as star Italian fencer Bebe Vio began her medal campaign with an easy victory.

Masters, who was born in Ukraine with birth defects believed to be linked to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, including missing thumbs and weight-bearing bones in her legs, claimed the seventh Paralympic gold of her career by winning the H4-5 category. The 35-year-old, who was adopted by an American family, has previously won medals in rowing and in a range of winter sports including cross-country skiing.

Storey, who is competing in her ninth Paralympics at the age of 46, slammed the Paris organizers after winning the 18th gold medal of a career that began

in swimming by taking the C5 time trial in the Paris suburbs ahead of French hope Heidi Gaugain.

Born without a functioning left hand, Storey has now won 29 Paralympics medals of all colors since she made her debut at the 1992 Barcelona Games.

But Storey said the course that measured 14.1 kilometres was "appalling" and said she had never raced on a Games course shorter than 22km.

"This is the shortest Paralympic time trial we have ever had, and I think it's a real shame because we don't get to showcase para-sport in the way we want to," Storey told British media.

"You'll have to ask organisers. There's plenty of time in the day for us to do two laps like the men. Having fought so hard for parity in women's cycling, to not have it is a real disappointment."

Rangers sink Yankees on walk-off slam

TEXAS: Wyatt Langford smashed a walk-off grand slam in the ninth inning, lifting the Texas Rangers to a 7-4 win over the New York Yankees on Tuesday in Arlington, Texas. While facing a full count with the bases loaded and one out, Langford connected on a slider from Clay Holmes (2-5), sending it 407 feet into the left field seats.

Rangers rookie reliever Walter Pennington (1-0) got the last out in the top of the ninth to earn his first major league win. Texas trailed 4-1 before narrowing the deficit in the eighth. Josh Jung, who went 2-for-3 with two RBIs, singled to drive in Josh Smith. Two batters later, Nathaniel Lowe's sacrifice fly brought Marcus Semien home to pull the Rangers within one. Anthony Volpe went 2-for-4 with two RBIs and a run for the Yankees. New York starter Carlos Rodon struck out 11 and held the Yankees to one hit through six innings. That lone hit was a solo shot by Jung.

Phillies 10, Blue Jays 9

Kyle Schwarber hit a three-run blast in the ninth inning for his third home run of the game as visiting Philadelphia defeated Toronto. Schwarber's go-ahead homer against Chad Green (4-5) was his 31st long ball of the season and gave him a career-best five hits. He had six RBIs. Orion Kerkering (4-2) earned the win thanks to Schwarber's late-game heroics. Daulton Varsho, Addison Barger and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit two-run homers for the Blue Jays.

Dodgers 6, Angels 2 (10 innings)

Mookie Betts' three-run homer capped a four-run 10th inning and helped lift the Dodgers to a victory over the Angels in Anaheim, Calif. Two-time American League MVP Shohei Ohtani played his first

regular-season game at Angel Stadium since leaving the Angels for the Dodgers in the offseason. He went 1-for-4 with one RBI, two runs and a walk. Miguel Rojas' RBI single put the Dodgers in front in the 10th against Roansy Contreras (2-4), who later served up Betts' homer. Michael Kopech (5-8) got the win.

Orioles 9, White Sox 0

Rookie Cade Povich pitched 7 1/3 shutout innings and struck out 10 as host Baltimore thrashed Chicago, sending the White Sox to their 12th consecutive defeat. Anthony Santander and Colton Cowser each knocked in two runs for Baltimore. Gunnar Henderson scored three times out of the leadoff spot. The Orioles, who have won four of their past five games, led 7-0 after two innings. White Sox starter Nick Nastrini (0-7) gave up seven runs (four earned) in 1 2/3 innings.

Nationals 6, Marlins 2

Joey Gallo slugged a three-run homer and Patrick Corbin won his third straight start as visiting Washington defeated Miami. Corbin (5-12) allowed seven hits, three walks and two runs in 5 2/3 innings. He struck out eight. Keibert Ruiz went 3-for-4 and fell a triple short of the cycle as the Nationals improved to 8-0 against Miami this season. Max Meyer (3-5) took the loss, allowing nine hits and five runs in 5 2/3 innings. Marlins right fielder Jesus Sanchez left the game in the second inning due to a back spasm. He got hurt stealing second base.

Rays 2, Twins 1

Logan Driscoll, making his big-league debut, singled in the winning run for his first major league hit to break a tie in the fourth as Tampa Bay topped Minnesota in St. Petersburg, Fla. Coming off his strongest start since returning from Tommy John surgery, Jeffrey Springs (2-2) yielded just one run on four hits in six innings while striking out four and walking two for the Rays. Carlos Santana homered for Minnesota.

'Bebe' starts her bid

Another of the global stars of Paralympism, Beatrice 'Bebe' Vio, began her title defence with an easy win in the women's foil category B quarter-final against Ukrainian Nadiia Doloh. Vio, who uses prosthetic arms after having all four limbs amputated when she contracted meningitis at the age of 11, won 15-2 to progress to the semi-final stage in the ornate surroundings of the Grand Palais.

The 27-year-old, known for her exuberant celebrations when she wins, took gold in the individual foil at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. Vio raced into a 7-0 lead before Doloh managed to score a point against her. Jordan's Omar Qarada was crowned the first Paralympic champion at the Porte de La Chapelle Arena as para powerlifting action at the Paris 2024 kicked off on Wednesday. In a thrilling contest, Qarada

once again stamped his dominance in men's up to 49kg - defending his Tokyo 2020 Paralympic gold medal with his best lift of 181kg in the third round. The 43-year-old Jordanian's effort on the bench was one kilogram above Turkey's 2022 European champion Abdullah Kayapinar who surprised everyone and stayed in contention until the end - even going for a world record attempt much like Qarada - only to settle for the silver.

Meanwhile, host nation France surpassed the number of gold medals they won three years ago in Tokyo thanks to Alexandre Leaute's victory in the C2 time trial. That gave France 12 golds, putting them fifth in the medals table.

China were top with 55 golds halfway through Wednesday's action, with Great Britain second on 31 golds and the USA third with 24. — AFP

Mets 7, Red Sox 2

David Peterson, pitching on his 29th birthday, struck out a career-high 11 over six innings and earned the win as host New York stayed hot with a victory over Boston in the middle game of a three-game interleague series. Francisco Lindor, Mark Vientos and Pete Alonso all homered for the Mets, who have won six straight. Peterson (9-1) allowed one run on six hits and one walk in improving to 4-0 with a 1.81 ERA in his past seven starts. Nick Sogard had an RBI single in the fifth inning and Emmanuel Valdez lofted a pinch-hit sacrifice fly to right in the eighth for the reeling Red Sox, who have lost four straight.

Braves 3, Rockies 0

Chris Sale pitched seven scoreless innings and became the first left-hander in Atlanta franchise history to reach 200 strikeouts in a single season as the Braves blanked visiting Colorado in the opener of a three-game series. The Braves maintained their half-game lead over the Mets in the race for the final wild-card spot in the National League. Sale (16-3) allowed six hits and no walks, struck out nine and earned his first career victory against Colorado. He took over the major league lead in strikeouts with 206. The Rockies have lost four of their past five. Kyle Freeland (4-7) pitched five innings and allowed two runs (one earned) on six hits.

Guardians 7, Royals 1

Brayan Rocchio homered and drove in four runs and Tanner Bibee tossed six strong innings, leading visiting Cleveland past Kansas City to send the Royals to their seventh consecutive loss. Bibee (11-6) surrendered one run on two hits to go along with three walks and six strikeouts. Kyle Manzardo matched a career high with three hits while Will Brennan had two hits and two runs for the Guardians, who have won five of their past six. The Royals have managed a total of six hits in two losses to the Guardians in the past two days. Kansas City has been outscored 39-17 during its longest losing streak of the year and has scored fewer than three runs in five straight games. — Reuters

Tiafoe, Navarro, Fritz boost home hopes of US Open

NEW YORK: Frances Tiafoe and Taylor Fritz set up an all-American US Open semi-final on Tuesday as compatriot Emma Navarro reached the women's last four to boost home hopes of a title sweep. The 20th seed Tiafoe progressed when ninth-ranked Grigor Dimitrov suffered an injury in the third set of their quarter-final and quit in the fourth with the score at 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 4-1.

Tiafoe also made the last four in 2022 while Fritz reached his first Grand Slam semi-final by defeating fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3).

Navarro, playing in front of her home New York crowd, broke through to a maiden Slam semi-final by defeating Paula Badosa of Spain 6-2, 7-5 after coming back from 5-1 down in the second set. She will tackle world number two and reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, who brushed aside Olympic gold medallist Zheng Qinwen 6-1, 6-2.

With Tiafoe and Fritz crashing on Friday, the US is guaranteed a home men's finalist for the first time since 2006 when Andy Roddick was defeated by Roger Federer. Roddick remains the last American man to capture a Grand Slam when he claimed the 2003 US Open.

"It's not the way I wanted to win even if I'm happy to get through to the semi-finals," said Tiafoe of Dimitrov's injury. "It was a very high-level match. You're going to see me against another American, it's going to be great. — AFP



NEW YORK: USA's Frances Tiafoe watches as ballboys try to catch a butterfly during the quarterfinal against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov. — AFP