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## Sparks fly at Harris-Trump debate

Biden, Harris and Trump visit 9/11 memorial • Taylor Swift endorses Kamala Harris

### Amir receives European Council President



**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Wednesday at Bayan Palace visiting President of the European Council Charles Michel and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed the agenda of the first EU and GCC Summit which will take place in October in Brussels. They also tackled the distinguished relationship between Kuwait and the EU and ways to boost cooperation, various topics of common interest as well as the latest regional and international developments. — KUNA

**NEW YORK:** Kamala Harris and Donald Trump shook hands Wednesday at New York's 9/11 memorial to mark the anniversary of the attacks, hours after they clashed in a combustible TV debate. The Democratic vice president delivered a strong performance against her Republican rival, most analysts said, as the two head toward the November election neck-and-neck in the polls.

Both candidates declared victory after coming face to face for the first time on the biggest night so far of the campaign — although any major shift in support may be unlikely. Pop megastar Taylor Swift broke her silence on US politics minutes after the debate, backing Harris as president and praising her as a “steady-handed, gifted leader”.

The ABC News-hosted debate in Philadelphia was punctuated by tense exchanges, with Harris focused on policy while Trump's answers were littered with wild falsehoods and were often about his past grievances. On Wednesday, Trump came out swinging in an early morning

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**NEW YORK:** US Vice President Kamala Harris, US President Joe Biden, former mayor of New York Michael Bloomberg, former US President Donald Trump and Republican vice presidential candidate Sen J D Vance join family and friends at Ground Zero, honoring the lives of those lost on the 23rd anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, on Sept 11, 2024. — AFP

### Probe ordered into 'poor organization' of Kuwait-Iraq tie



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi tours Jaber Stadium before the match between Kuwait and Iraq on Sept 10, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 16)

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi asked the Public Authority of Sports to contact Kuwait Football Association to launch an investigation into the poor organization of the Iraq-Kuwait football match on Tuesday night. The historical game between the archrivals was held at Jaber Stadium under extremely high temperatures without providing outlets to sell water, forcing fans to shout “we need water” most of the time.

In addition, it was alleged that although the football authorities issued only 50,000 tickets, around 80,000 fans were allowed into the stadium. In his letter, the minister called for taking the necessary legal measures against those found responsible for the poor organization.

### Kuwait youth handball team qualifies for World Championship

**AMMAN:** Kuwait's youth handball team qualified for the World Championship after defeating Japan 27-23 in the semifinals of the 10th Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship on Wednesday in Amman. This marks the fourth occasion the competition is hosted by the Jordan Handball Federation (JHF), having previously hosted it in 2008, 2014 and 2018.

The championship serves as a qualifying event for the 11th IHF Men's Youth (U19) Handball World Championship in Slovenia, scheduled for July/August 2025. The top five teams from this competition will secure qualification spots for the World Championship. South Korea are the defending champions, having clinched the title three times in 2005, 2014 and 2022.



**AMMAN:** Kuwait's youth handball team celebrate after beating Japan 27-23 at the 10th Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship on Sept 11, 2024.

### Kuwait army chief affirms military's readiness, vigilance

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain emphasized Wednesday the wise leadership's dedication to following up on the affairs and conditions of the members of the armed forces and ensuring their readiness and preparedness. He said they are “the nation's shields and the first to answer the call of duty in defending its security, stability, and the safety of its territory”.

This came in a press statement issued by the General Staff following an inspection visit by Muzain to the 26th Al-Sour Mechanized Brigade, where he was received by the Commander of the Land Forces Brig Gen Fahad Abdullah, the Commander of the 63rd Mechanized In-

fantry Battalion and several officers of the brigade.

Muzain praised the efforts of the armed forces personnel for their competence, ability and readiness to carry out various tasks and duties, which are the result of continuous training and qualification. He wished the members of the armed forces continued success and urged them to give their utmost for the protection of the nation, remaining loyal to their oath and pledging to listen and obey HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and HH the Crown Prince.

The visit began with a detailed explanation of the key duties of the 26th Al-Sour Mechanized Brigade and the nature of the tasks they perform. Muzain also toured several facilities within the brigade. Muzain also inspected the Sabah Joint Command Group, where he was received by the commander of the group and several officers.

During the visit, he was briefed on the nature of the tasks and duties of the Sabah Joint Command Force, as well as the level of readiness and preparedness of its personnel. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain visits the Sabah Joint Command Group on Sept 11, 2024. — KUNA

### Iran president deepens Iraq ties on first trip

**BAGHDAD:** Iran and Iraq on Wednesday signed more than a dozen agreements to deepen already strong ties as Masoud Pezeshkian visited Baghdad on his first foreign trip as president of the Islamic republic. The three-day trip comes amid turmoil in the Middle East sparked by the war in Gaza, which has drawn in Iran-backed armed groups and complicated Iraq's relations with the United States.

Speaking at a press conference alongside Pezeshkian, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani said both governments opposed any expansion of the Zionist war in Gaza. “In light of the

escalation that the region has been going through, we have spoken a lot about the importance of stability,” Sudani said, blaming the Zionist entity for the regional spillover of the war. Pezeshkian announced that “14 cooperation memorandums were signed between Iran and Iraq, which is the starting point of the expansion of cooperation”. “If we are together, we will avoid falling into the fire,” he added.

Pezeshkian has vowed to make relations with neighboring countries a priority as he seeks to ease Iran's international isolation and mitigate the impact of US-led sanctions on its economy. His visit comes after Western powers on Tuesday announced fresh sanctions on Iran for supplying Russia with short-range missiles for use against Ukraine. Hours before Pezeshkian's arrival, an explosion rocked a US



**BAGHDAD:** Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani greets Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sept 11, 2024. — AFP

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# A regional first: Zain Group partners with 'Be My Eyes'

## Zain provides accessibility assistance to people who are blind or have low vision

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications, operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, has entered a regional first-of-its-kind strategic partnership with 'Be My Eyes' to provide instant visual assistance for people who are blind or have low vision. Following a series of successful pilots across Zain markets, the new group-wide partnership with Be My Eyes will see Zain personnel regularly act as sighted volunteers on the Be My Eyes platform.

Be My Eyes develops and runs the largest and fastest-growing accessibility app for the blind and low vision community worldwide, with approximately 700,000 users globally of which close to 100,000 are Arabic-speaking blind users. The recipient of several innovation and accessibility awards, Be My Eyes also has over 7.7 million volunteers, spread across 150+ countries providing support in 180+ languages.

The collaboration will see Be My Eyes educate and facilitate 16 volunteering events, over a period of a year, for Zain employees, with each event lasting four hours and up to 100 personnel. The volunteering events will allow Zainers to sign up and answer one-way video, two-way audio calls from people in need of some sort of assistance. In practice, once the volunteer gets the video call, they will answer user questions about anything the user's smartphone camera can see, such as reading a document, identifying where something is, in their home, school or workplace, describing a new environment, and many other potential scenarios.

Commenting on the initiative, Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, said, "We are an operator from the region and for the region, passionate about community programs that add meaningful connectivity to all people we have the privilege of serving and beyond. We are proud of our record of introducing new solutions and initiatives to the region for the first time, and our collaboration with Be My Eyes reflects our commitment

### Bader Al-Kharafi:

- "This strategic collaboration reflects our commitment to inclusion by harnessing technology to better serve the global community"
- Be My Eyes accessibility platform connects sighted volunteers with people around the world who are blind or have low vision through live video and artificial intelligence
- Be My Eyes has 700,000 users globally, of which close to 100,000 are Arabic-speaking, benefiting from the app



to inclusion by harnessing technology to better serve the global community."

"At Be My Eyes, we are thrilled to partner with Zain Group, a leader in the digital landscape across the Middle East and Africa. This collaboration represents a significant step forward in our mission to make the world more accessible for blind and low-vision individuals," said Mike Buckley, CEO of Be My Eyes. "Together, we are not only enhancing

to increase in the coming years. Sonmez emphasized Kuwait's importance as an economic partner for Turkey, noting that Turkish contractors have completed 50 projects in Kuwait worth a total of USD 902 billion, adding that Kuwait was considered one of the key markets for Turkish construction firms and ranking 12th in terms of investments.

One of the most significant projects is Kuwait International Airport, undertaken by Turkey's Limak Construction, with a total cost of KD 1.3 billion (about \$4.3 billion), marking the largest overseas contract won by Turkish contractors in a single contract. In addition to construction firms, Turkish consulting firms have also completed 21 technical consulting projects in Kuwait, valued at \$65 million.

Sonmez added that promising opportunities exist for further cooperation in sectors such as healthcare, education, and banking, with Turkey aiming to support Kuwait's sustainable development goals. Regarding Kuwaiti investments in Turkey, the ambassador pointed out that Kuwait was among the largest investors in Turkey, with investments totaling \$1.096 billion between 2002 and 2023. Turkey continues to attract more Kuwaiti investments, particularly in industries such as manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy.

Sonmez also outlined Turkey's key exports to Kuwait, which in 2023 included clothing, silk, textiles, carpets, metal products, and electrical machinery. Kuwait's exports to Turkey comprised steel, plastics, organic chemicals, and industrial machinery, among other goods. The Turkish tourism sector was also experiencing a surge in Kuwaiti visitors, with around 400,000 Kuwaitis having traveled to Turkey in 2023.

Also, Kuwaiti nationals purchased 15,000 properties in Turkey between 2015 and June 2024, reflecting their confidence in the Turkish market. Sonmez noted that the Turkish-Kuwaiti Agreement on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments, renewed in 2010 and enforced in 2013, has played a key role in strengthening investment relations. She affirmed that the agreement remains an important foundation for long-term investment collaboration between the two nations.

Regarding defense, Sonmez revealed that Kuwait purchased Turkish Bayraktar TB2 in 2023, underscoring the evolving bilateral relationship in defense industries, in which Turkey was eager to enhance cooperation in this sector by providing advanced technology and training. Turkey's defense industry has seen significant growth, with exports to over 170 countries, and the ambassador emphasized that defense cooperation was not just part of foreign trade but also a strategic element of bilateral relations between Turkey and Kuwait. — KUNA

ly paid by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Cairo.

The event comes at a time when the Arab region is undergoing critical circumstances that necessitate persistent consultation and coordination, given that it comes ahead of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which is expected to come up with decisive resolutions aiming at putting an end to the current regional tensions, he said. The joint committee is meant to promote Kuwaiti-Egyptian bonds and to push them forward at all levels as clear-cut and unequivocal proof of deep relations between sisterly nations, the former minister noted.

Secretary of the Egyptian parliament's foreign relations committee, MP Tareq Al-Kholi, said the committee meeting, which will be co-chaired by both sides' foreign ministers, comes under very delicate and significant circumstances. He said the challenges haunting the Arab region, in fact, require concerted efforts and relentless coordination involving all Arab countries, pointing out

accessibility but also fostering meaningful connections that provide information, with speed and elegance, about a world not designed for the blind."

### Summary of 'Inclusive' initiatives

Zain is one of the most active companies regionally with respect to providing access to people with disabilities having implemented a fully-fledged disability inclusive strategy, reflecting its commitment to fostering technology to support this community. Zain has introduced an array of initiatives under its Disability's WE ABLE program, most recently, in August 2024, having over 80 of its people with disabilities (PWDs), the company introduced 'The Masters', an Employee Resource Group made up of approximately 25 PWDs all with a collective purpose of enabling them to create, lead, and shape their experiences at Zain through a focus on four core impact areas: (1) Disability Inclusion Strategy (2) Accessibility in Decision-Making (3) Learn and Lead (4) Voice and Visibility.

Over recent years, Zain also introduced in Jordan, a service to allow people with low vision, blind, hearing impaired, or deaf individuals to interact with contracts and understand their terms through an audio-visual video available through scanning a QR Code located in Zain showrooms across the Kingdom. Moreover, the company's



Grow program saw the training of 28 fresh graduates with disabilities teaching them valuable lessons and knowledge and skills related to mastering job interviews, business technology, teamwork and tools that resulted in the recruitment of 10 graduates to join Zain full-time.

Other initiatives include celebrating Braille Day by teaching employees Braille; celebrating World Hearing Day by conducting health checks and tests for employees; Sign language trainings for more than 350 employees; holding multiple sessions where employees are taught about disability and accessibility; a strategic partnership with Purplespace, the world's only professional development hub for disability network leaders; Physical accessibility audits of all Zain headquarters across all markets; and implementation of "Reasonable Accommodations and Accessibility Guidelines."

Zain's strategic partnership with Be My Eyes will result in having more volunteers from the company's eight country footprint on the app to act as volunteers for the Be My Eyes user community. The innovative and personal approach aligns with both Zain's Corporate Sustainability program; and the Disability program's 'WE ABLE' initiative focusing on empowering its people to practice social responsibility, fostering a society where everyone has equal opportunities to dream and succeed.

## GCC-Turkish FTA creates opportunities for Kuwait and Turkish companies

KUWAIT: Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez said that the anticipated Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Turkey would enhance trade cooperation and new investment opportunities for Kuwaiti and Turkish companies. In an interview with KUNA, Sonmez said that ongoing negotiations regarding the agreement cover a wide range of areas, including trade in goods, rules of origin, customs procedures, intellectual property rights protection, and investment facilitation.

She explained that the FTA aims to establish a favorable investment environment that will boost trade between the GCC countries and Turkey, fostering broader economic relations. The first round of negotiations took place in Ankara in July, and



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez

the agreement was expected to be signed soon, she said. Trade between the GCC and Turkey increased significantly from \$1.201 billion in 2002 to \$31.4 billion in 2023, and Sonmez anticipates continued growth once the agreement is implemented, which would lead to expanded cooperation across various economic sectors.

Sonmez highlighted that 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Turkey, praising the bilateral relations and affirming Turkey's commitment to strengthening its relationship with Kuwait in fields such as trade, investment, and tourism. Economic and commercial relations between Kuwait and Turkey were witnessing continuous growth, with bilateral trade having reached USD 338 million in the first half of 2023.

The total trade by the end of 2023 stood at approximately USD 688 million, and this was expected

## Kuwait-Egypt committee marks deep cooperation, enduring accord

CAIRO: Kuwait and Egypt are tied with deep-rooted historical relations at both official and unofficial levels, marking a model for pan-Arab relations. Based on deep cooperation and continued rapprochement in various domains over decades, both countries have always been sharing support and solidarity during all Arab events.

The unremitting convening of the Kuwaiti-Egyptian Higher Committee is the normal outgrowth of such close and firm ties between both sides. In this regard, former Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Orabi told KUNA that this year's 13th session of the joint committee was one of the outcomes of the significant visit recent-



Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences celebrates the graduation of 476 corporals and 25 policemen from the Police School. — KUNA photos



## Academy celebrates graduation of 501 corporals, police

KUWAIT: Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences celebrated on Wednesday the graduation of the 41st batch of corporals and the 94th batch of policemen from the Police School, with a total of 501 graduates, including 476 corporals and 25 policemen. The General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry of Interior said in a press statement that the graduation ceremony was held at the academy under the patronage of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, in the presence of Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Education and Training Affairs Major General Sheikh Fawaz Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General of Saad Al-Abdullah Academy Brigadier Ali Al-Wuhaib, and a number of security leaders.

Major General Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled congratulated the graduates on joining the police force, conveying to them the greetings and blessings of



First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah and Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He called on the graduates to respect the security institution and its employees, to abide by the oath, and to apply the law, justice, and equality without discrimination between citizens and residents, in addition to appearing in a decent manner and respecting the military uniform. — KUNA



Tareq Al-Kholi



Mohammad Al-Orabi

that Cairo and Kuwait have always shared identical views about various challenges and issues of mutual concern.

It is essential to work together in order to address the regional challenges, primarily the ongoing war in Gaza, said the Egyptian MP, speaking highly of the fervent efforts of Egypt and Kuwait to reach

a Gaza ceasefire and to halt the Israeli occupation aggression on the Palestinian people. Al-Kholi commended Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations as a "unique model" that mirrors one of the deepest ties at the pan-Arab level, noting that the joint committee's current meetings in Cairo would certainly produce visions about response to the ongoing challenges and developments.

Two-day preparatory meetings of the joint committee kicked off in Cairo on Wednesday at the level of senior officials from both countries. The committee will convene in Cairo on September 12 under the chairmanship of Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Egyptian counterpart Badr Abdelatty. The Kuwaiti-Egyptian higher committee was established in 1998 in a bid to ensure high-level coordination and cooperation between both Arab countries in various cooperative domains and areas. The committee convened its 12th edition in Kuwait in 2019 under the chairmanship of both sides' then foreign ministers, with officials from both official and unofficial sectors having attended. — KUNA

Local

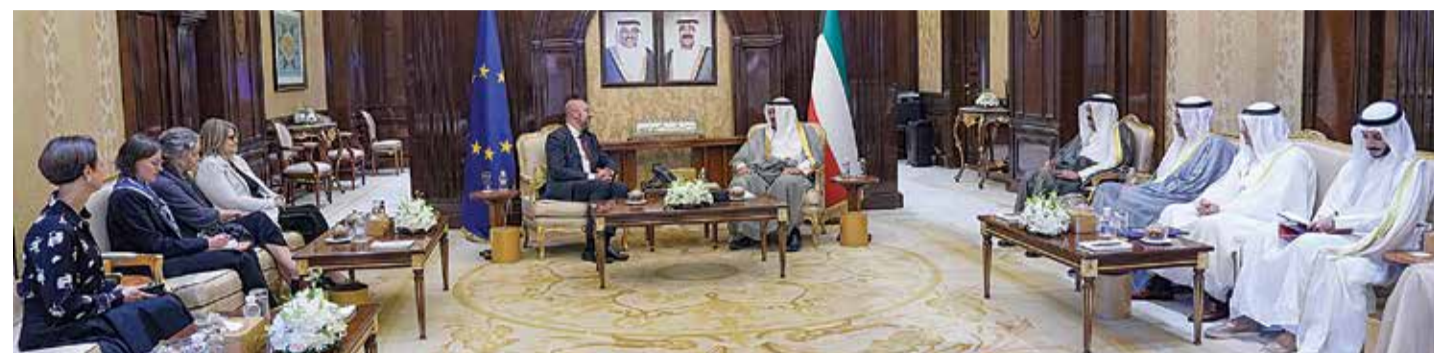
## PM meets Europe Council President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday at Bayan Palace visiting President of the European Council Charles Michel and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed the relationship between Kuwait and the EU, ways to boost cooperation, issues of mutual interest and the latest regional and international developments. The meeting was attended by the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, and Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Ambassador Sadiq Marafi. — KUNA



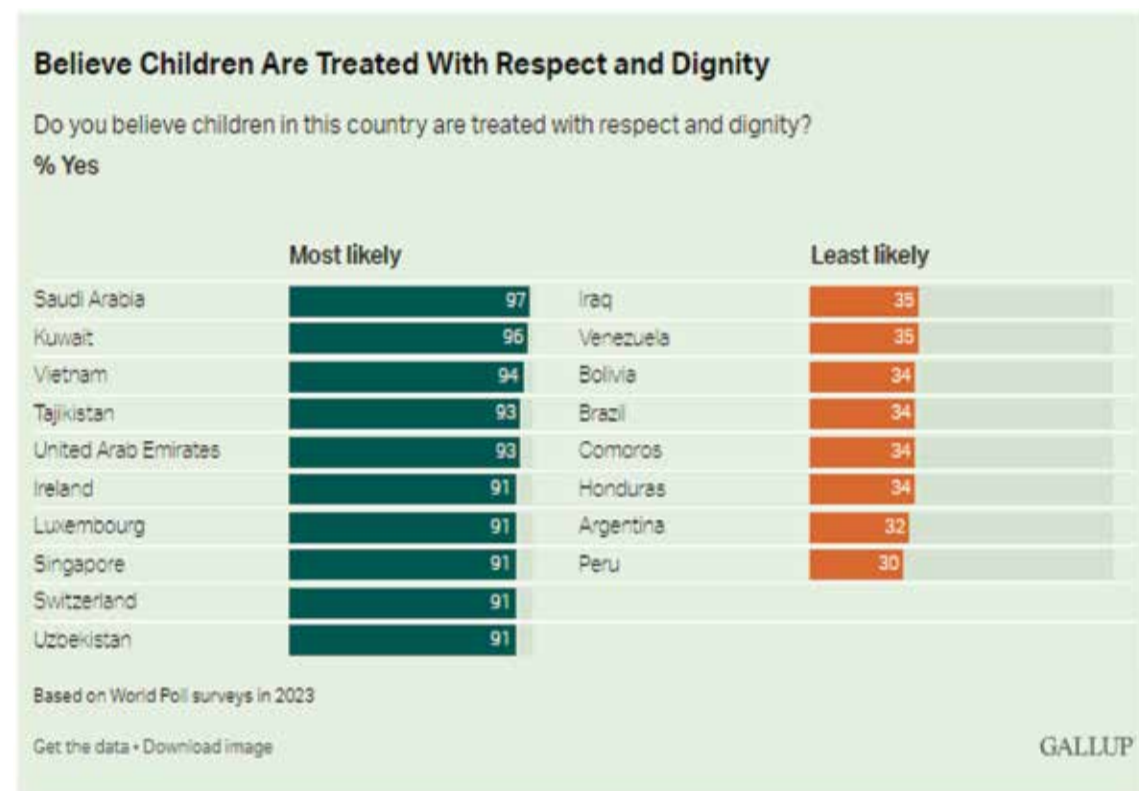
## Kuwait's Crown Prince receives European Council's President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday at Bayan Palace visiting President of the European Council Charles Michel and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed the relationship between Kuwait and the EU, ways to boost cooperation, issues of mutual interest and the latest regional and international developments. The meeting was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Director of the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince Gen Jamal Theyab, and Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Ambassador Sadiq Marafi. — KUNA



# GCC children treated with respect

## Kuwait makes the top five; Latin America noticeably absent



Countries in Latin America dominate the bottom of the list -- as they have in many years -- with just over one in three or fewer residents of Venezuela (35%), Bolivia (34%), Brazil (34%), Honduras (34%),

WASHINGTON: People's perceptions about two aspects of children's welfare - whether they are treated with respect and dignity and have the opportunity to learn and grow - provide insight into their hopes for the next generation. When it comes to believing that children in their country are treated with respect and dignity - which nearly all world leaders have pledged to guarantee as signatories to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child - three of the top five countries where people are most likely to believe this are Gulf states. In 2023, residents of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates almost universally said children in their country are treated with respect and dignity. Countries in Latin America dominate the bottom of the list - as they have in many years - with just over one in three or fewer residents of Venezuela

(35 percent), Bolivia (34 percent), Brazil (34 percent), Honduras (34 percent), Argentina (32 percent) and Peru (30 percent) saying children in their country are treated with respect and dignity. But also making the list again is Iraq (35 percent).

The countries where people are most and least likely to believe children have the opportunity to learn and grow do not necessarily mirror those on the "respect and dignity" list, although there is some overlap in the countries toward the top. Kuwait (95 percent) makes the top five, while the United Arab Emirates (92 percent) and Saudi Arabia (92 percent) narrowly miss making the top 10. Latin American countries are noticeably absent from the list of countries where people are least likely to believe children have the opportunity to learn and grow. Instead, a host of countries in the Middle East

events as a coherent story. This type of memory forms in our minds in a sensory and organized way, making it easy to retrieve and express events. And there is the procedural memory, which is responsible for how to perform certain tasks. It is embedded in our minds as skills and automatic behavioral patterns, without necessarily being linked to the story of how these skills or patterns were learned. For example, knowing how to hold a spoon without remembering the story of how we were taught this skill," he explained.

"It's a chain where each link is connected to the previous one. It is very difficult to blame parents when each had their own parents, and those grandparents had their own parents, each of whom underwent different experiences that may influence their parenting style. Clearly, their "procedural memory" (as explained earlier) has been influenced in many ways, resulting in certain patterns and relational styles. Therefore, trying to place blame on parents is unproductive. I would argue that effective and genuine psychotherapy is that which fosters real compassion for individuals whose actions have been shaped by negative experiences and undesirable procedural memory in parenting, which could include the parents themselves," he added.

According to Al-Manea, it thus becomes evident how complex the development of relational aspects between parents and their child is, and how deep this is, as well as any significant human relationship. "We should ask, if a mother who has struggled for years to change a relational pattern with her children - acquired due to her own parents - has failed despite repeated and sincere efforts, will she be considered (responsible) for her child's psychological disorders? Will a father who is tormented by guilt over his treatment of his children, yet unable to change some of his patterns despite his efforts, be (responsible) for his child's psychological disorders?" he questioned.

It is also aimed at cementing joint action and cooperation in the sports and youth sectors. He has also indicated that it is the latest of a chain of such brotherly reciprocal visits by officials of the two countries to activate partnership, cooperation, and integration in crucial and vital realms, hoping that it will be capped with positive results for the interests of the Kuwaiti and Qatari youngsters and athletes.

The Kuwaiti-Qatari ties are solid and deeply rooted, under the sagacious leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Qatar Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, he said, affirming the necessity of action according to guidelines by the political leadership to enhance further the distinguished ties "among the brothers." — KUNA

## Kuwait children have ample opportunities to learn and grow

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: According to a research by Gallup, Kuwait ranks among the top five countries in the world where residents believe that children are treated with respect and dignity, with nearly universal agreement on this point in 2023. The research showed that 95 percent of Kuwaitis believe that children in the country have ample opportunities to learn and grow, placing Kuwait in the top five globally for this metric as well. This high perception reflects the country's focus on child welfare, aligning with similar results from neighboring Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Andrew Rzepa, Executive Director of Gallup's global analytics division in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, revealed that the sample size of the World Poll in Kuwait in 2023 was 1,071 respondents, which includes Kuwaitis, Arab expats and non-Arabs who were able to complete the interview in Arabic, English, Bengali or Hindi.

Regarding Kuwait's education system evolving, he stated "In recent years, Kuwait has introduced the 'Kuwait National Development Plan', also known as New

Kuwait 2023. This is a government strategy which has education at its heart (as one of seven policy pillars). Such policy reforms seek to invest more in education and training to meet the needs of Kuwait's growing youth population. A majority (59 percent) of 15-29s in Kuwait is classed as thriving - this figure has never been higher among Kuwait's youth since the start of the Gallup World Poll. It also puts young people on par with Saudi for thriving, ahead of the UAE." The high ranking of Kuwait in terms of children's dignity and learning opportunities has significant long-term implications for national development. Rzepa noted that according to the recent World Happiness Report, the wellbeing and emotional health of children are strong predictors of happiness in adulthood, adding "Investing in the children of today is therefore part of investing in the future tomorrow. For the last several years in Kuwait, people with higher levels of education have been more optimistic for the future in general, and the future of their local economies."

Concerning the challenges remain in Kuwait regarding children's welfare, Rzepa explained that there is one challenge that remains, which is ensuring the benefits of better education extend to everyone in society, regardless of household income level. He added, "In 2023, the report of income quintiles and people who are satisfied with the education system showed that 20 percent of the poorest were less satisfied with a percentage of 71 percent compared with the 20 percent of the richest who were satisfied 95 percent. While this still represents a majority of the poorest income quintile that is satisfied with schools in their country, there is a way to go to close the gap."

and North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa take their place. Only Iraq, where nearly half of the population is younger than 15, scores among the worst in the world on both children being treated with respect and having the opportunity to learn and grow. After decades of conflict and underinvestment, millions of children in Iraq - especially girls - remain out of school.

### Changes in children's welfare

Although Saudi Arabia ranks high on both measures of youth development - and has for the past several years - this has not always been the case. Over the past decade, Saudis have become increasingly likely to believe children in their country have the opportunity to learn and grow and are treated with respect, with both measures rising by 23 per-

centage points and 26 points, respectively. Saudis' changing perceptions may be linked to the country's recent investment in education and in its youth, which represents a huge proportion of its population. In recent years, education has received one of the highest proportions of government spending in all areas of Saudi Arabia's economy, focusing on improving teacher quality, curriculum and attainment levels.

Bottom Line Wellbeing and emotional health in childhood, according to the recent World Happiness Report, are the best predictors of happiness later in life. As such, countries that invest in treating their children with respect and dignity, and affording them the opportunity to learn and grow, are really investing in a prosperous, more sustainable future for all.

## Are parents responsible for their children's psychological issues?

By Ghadeer Ghloum

KUWAIT: Majority of people seems to agree on blaming the parents for the suffering of individuals with mental health issues and their victims as well. However, the question arises: does all this complexity simply boil down to blaming the parents, or are there other factors that have been overlooked? To provide a more accurate analysis of the issue, Kuwait Times interviewed psychological consultant Abdullah Al-Manea to uncover what lies beyond the surface. Al-Manea said it is inaccurate to simply blame a person's parents for their issue. Therefore, he refers to analytical therapy, describing the types of long-term memory, especially those that develop in the early years.



Abdullah Al-Manea

"Memory is not a single, fixed entity but a complex world of different types and functions. There is the narrative memory, which allows us to reconstruct and recount

## Minister receives Qatari counterpart

KUWAIT: The Minister of Information, Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi on Wednesday received, at Kuwait International Airport, the Qatari Sports and Youth Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmad Al-Thani on the occasion of his official visit to Kuwait. In a statement after the reception, minister Al-Mutairi said Sheikh Hamad's visit depicts the historic bilateral relations bonding the two brotherly countries.



## Kuwait's MoH assists Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy patients

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Allied Medical Services Dr Abdullah Al-Faras said Kuwait is the first to provide treatment for patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy in the Middle East. Duchenne muscular dystrophy is a severe type of muscular dystrophy affecting boys. The onset of muscle weakness typically begins around the age of four with rapid progression.

Al-Faras, representing Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, spoke during the ceremony organized by Kuwait Medical Genetic Center (KMGC) in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry on the occasion of World Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Day. He said it is an autosomal recessive disease linked to the X chromosome and considered one of the most common types of muscle dystrophy, as it affects 1 out of every 3,500 males born. Dr Al-Faras said the Ministry has been tackling the disease since 2000, and KMGC has recorded more than 130 Duchenne cases in Kuwait.

The disease has killed patients in their 20s and 30s, but hopes were renewed in 2016 due to the understanding by the doctors on the nature of the disease after realizing the type of genetic defect and its location in the human genome. He said Duchenne needs comprehensive and integrated health and social care that starts as soon as the patient is referred to KMGC and carrying out the full genetic



Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah

Dr Laila Bastaki

Dr Abdullah Al-Faras

analysis. Doctors care for the patients through an integrated medical approach in all child departments. They monitor their breathing, digestive systems, and physiotherapy.

Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah said Kuwait will continue to create awareness of this rare disease. He said that Kuwait sent a proposal to create Duchenne awareness themed "World Day for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Awareness" at the United Nations on September 7. This was adopted by 128 countries.

Meanwhile, head of KMGC, Dr Laila Bastaki, said Kuwait's proposal at the United Nations was a distinguished approach. She said that Kuwait has recorded around 141 Duchenne cases of various ages till date. The disease occurs due to a genetic defect, but in some cases, it may occur suddenly without a genetic origin. Dr Bastaki said the Ministry has been providing the medicines despite their high cost since 2016, and Kuwait is among the first countries in the region to do so. She said that priority was given to children aged 4-6 years despite the medicines' high cost (about \$3 million).

## Local

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Website: www.kuwaittimes.comSahel experiences  
a technical glitch

**KUWAIT:** The official spokesperson for the unified government e-services application (Sahel) Yousef Kazem announced that the application has experienced a technical glitch that has led to a number of users facing difficulty in accessing the application and using its services. Kazem told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Wednesday that "work is currently underway to restore things to normal."

Kazem pointed out that users can gradually return to using the application by first going to the (My Identity) application to update the data of the digital civil card, then opening the (Sahel) application and entering the civil number for authentication. He stressed that the concerned technical teams are currently working to completely fix the glitch and restore things to normal as soon as possible. — KUNA



Yousef Kazim

# Al-Safa Charity opens endocrinology and dialysis hospital in Kyrgyzstan

## Project enhances Kuwait's leading role in humanitarian work



Officials take a group photo after the event. — KUNA photos



Medical team



Acting Secretary General of the Awqaf Public Foundation Nasser Al-Hamad



Hospital's medical devices.

**BISHKEK:** Al-Safa Charity and Humanitarian Society inaugurated the endocrinology and dialysis hospital in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, on Wednesday, with support from the General Secretariat of Kuwait's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. During the opening ceremony, which was attended by Kyrgyz Health Minister Alymkadyr Beishenaliev, the Chairman of the Society's Board of Directors, Mohammad Al-Shaya, highlighted the significance of this new medical facility.

Al-Shaya emphasized that the hospital's project enhances Kuwait's leading role in humanitarian work, show-

ing the country's positive contribution to humanitarian efforts worldwide. He also stressed the importance of implementing healthcare projects that align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, while praising the strategic partnership between Al-Safa Charity and the General Secretariat of Awqaf, which has led to numerous exceptional international projects.

On his part, Nasser Al-Hamad, the Acting Secretary General of the Awqaf Public Foundation, noted that the hospital was one of the few specializing in endocrinology and dialysis in Kyrgyzstan. He explained that the hospital was initially built years ago,

but construction was halted due to financial challenges. The charity's mission was to complete and fully equip this hospital.

Al-Hamad affirmed Kuwait's ongoing commitment to Islamic cooperation through governmental support, partnerships, and agreements fostered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other sectors focused on development and international cooperation. This hospital opening was part of a series of humanitarian projects by Al-Safa Charity in Kyrgyzstan, as part of its 16th charity campaign, which began on Sunday and will continue until September 13. — KUNA

## GCC and China discuss regional, international issues, relations

**RIYADH:** A session of GCC-Chinese discussions was held on Wednesday in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, which dealt with joint cooperation and regional and international issues. The General Secretariat stated in a statement that the session was chaired by the Secretary General of the GCC, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, and by the Chinese side, Chairman of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, Li Qiang, on ways to enhance joint cooperation.

According to the statement, the discussions dealt with enhancing cooperation between the two sides, as well as translating the outcomes of the first Gulf-Chinese summit held in Saudi Arabia in December 2022. The Secretary-General stressed the importance of moving forward and concluding the negotiations during the next short period as well as implementing the joint action plan for the period (2023-2027).



Secretary-General of the GCC Jassem Al-Budaiwi with Chairman of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Li Qiang. — KUNA photos



A session of GCC-Chinese summit in Riyadh.

The session also discussed the exchange of views on a number of regional and international issues, notably the crisis in Gaza and the ongoing violations by the Zionist occupation forces against

the brotherly Palestinian people. According to the statement, the Chinese side stressed the need to work on a ceasefire and implement all relevant international and UN resolutions. — KUNA



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Arab-Latin meeting.

## 'Support Palestine UN membership'

**CAIRO:** League of Arab States urged Wednesday countries of South America and the Caribbean to continue their support to Arab efforts aiming for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations. This was at the permanent envoy's meeting at the League and Ambassadors of aforementioned countries, with Kuwaiti Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi attending.

Chair of the 162nd Arab League session, and Yemeni envoy Riyadh Al-Kaabri called this congregation an embodiment of the communal cooperation and solidarity. He mentioned that this meeting is held at a critical time prior to the UN General Assembly. Ambassador Al-Kaabri urged South America and Caribbean to continue their pursuit for Palestinian people's legitimate right to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

He also lauded the South American stance in international events supportive of Palestinian right, and called on the international community to pressurize occupation into adhering to international resolutions and court rulings. The Yemeni diplomat urged states that have not recognized Palestine to do so and support Palestinian claim to full membership. As for League Undersecretary for internation-



Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the League of Arab States Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi

al political affairs Ambassador Khaled Minzlawi, he called the Palestinian issue a humanitarian one, describing it as the struggle of people towards justice, freedom and independence.

At the time 79th UNGA held, Palestine still under heavy strikes that have killed tens of thousands, injured and displaced of hundreds of thousands one, putting them through unimaginable circumstances, he stated. Minzlawi said he is confident in South American and Caribbean efforts on diplomatic and political levels in supporting the Palestinian claim. The Arab League is working with the Arab bloc in New York and other partners all over the world to achieve this momentous goal, he mentioned. — KUNA



Southeast Asia typhoon toll nears 200

## Mexico approves popular election of judges in world first

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GAZA: Palestinians walk outside the devastated Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City as it reopens the reception and emergency wards after rehabilitating and repurposing outpatient facilities, on September 1, 2024. — AFP

# Curable diseases fester in besieged Gaza

## Zionist offensive leaves health sector in tatters, turning sickness into a death sentence

**BEIRUT:** In Gaza, falling ill can be a death sentence. Cancer patients are waiting to die, polio has returned, and many of the doctors and nurses who might have offered help are dead while the hospitals they worked at have been reduced to rubble. Doctors and health professionals say that even if the Zionist war were to stop tomorrow, it will take years to rebuild the healthcare sector and people will continue to die because preventable diseases are not being treated on time. "People are dying on a daily basis because they cannot get the basic treatment they need," said Riham Jafari, advocacy and communications coordinator at rights group ActionAid Palestine. Cancer patients "are waiting for their turn to die," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The Zionist entity and Hamas agreed on limited pauses in the fighting to allow children to be vaccinated against polio after a one-year-old baby boy was found to be partially paralyzed from the disease, the first case in the crowded strip in 25 years. But even as crowds gathered in the southern cities of Rafah and Khan Younis for vaccinations on September 5, a Zionist strike killed five people at the Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah, health officials say.

"It will take long and so much effort in order to restore the level of care that we used to have

in Gaza," said Mohammed Aghaalkurdi, medical program lead at Medical Aid for Palestinians. Every day he sees around 180 children with skin diseases that he "just cannot treat," he said. "Due to vaccination campaign interruptions, lack of supplies, lack of hygiene items and infection prevention control material, it (healthcare) is just deteriorating."

The Zionist offensive has killed 40,800 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry, with around 92,000 wounded. It began after Hamas-led militants attacked the south of the Zionist entity, killing 1,200 people. But beyond the Gaza death toll, people are also succumbing to illnesses that could be cured in normal circumstances. As with the re-emergence of polio, children will bear the brunt of these long-term consequences, health experts say. "We are talking about disabilities, we are talking about intellectual disabilities, mental health issues," said Aghaalkurdi. "Things that will stick to the child until they die."

### Specialists killed

At least 490 healthcare workers have been killed since the conflict erupted, according to Gaza's health ministry. A Reuters investigation found that 55 highly qualified specialist doctors were among those killed.

Many people have become weak from a lack of food, as prices of basic commodities have more than quadrupled since the conflict began. When they become ill, they are also too frightened to journey to the few remaining hospitals, Jafari said.

Meanwhile, skin diseases are rampant because of a lack of cleaning supplies and hygiene products, Jafari said. In markets, a bottle of shampoo can cost around \$50. The Zionist entity has severely restricted the flow of food and aid into Gaza, and humanitarian agencies have warned of the risk of famine. Jafari expects a reckoning after the war ends. "There is delayed suffering, delayed sadness, there are diseases that are being delayed," she said. "There is an entire journey of suffering that is being delayed until the end of the war," she said.

### Cancer 'death sentence'

Manal Ragheb Fakhri al-Masri, 42, has not had any medicine in five months and has not even been able to shower for two weeks. Displaced seven times with her nine children, she has a heart condition and a benign tumor in her stomach and was supposed to leave Gaza for treatment earlier this year. But then her husband was killed and she could not bear to leave her children. Now, having also

suffered several strokes, she is bedridden, unable to leave her tent by the sea in Al-Mawasi, which the Zionist entity has bombed despite designating it as a safe zone.

"My husband used to take care of me and get medicine and feed his children," she said in a phone interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Now I do not know what to do. We do not have the most basic things." Her children try to help as much as they can and sometimes bring her seawater for her to wash with but the salty liquid offers no respite. Her children are also all suffering from red rashes but they have no creams to soothe their burning limbs.

Waseem Alzaanin, a general practitioner with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, said the lack of drugs, equipment and medical facilities is killing his cancer patients. Gaza's only cancer center was destroyed earlier this year, he said, and many of his stage-one cancer patients are now classified as stage-four. "The most basic requirements are not present. We cannot do anything except give them painkillers and make them comfortable with what life they have left," he said. "It is like a death sentence," he added. "Let us not kid ourselves. We have no medical system." — Reuters

## Fact check: Harris, Trump's presidential debate scrutinized

**WASHINGTON:** Kamala Harris and Donald Trump clashed Tuesday in the pair's first and so far only scheduled debate of the 2024 election campaign. Harris, the US vice president and Democratic Party candidate, and Trump, the Republican nominee, traded claims about each other's record in office, as well as their plans if they emerge victorious after November 5's election. AFP fact-checked the accuracy of what both contenders said on key issues:

### The economy

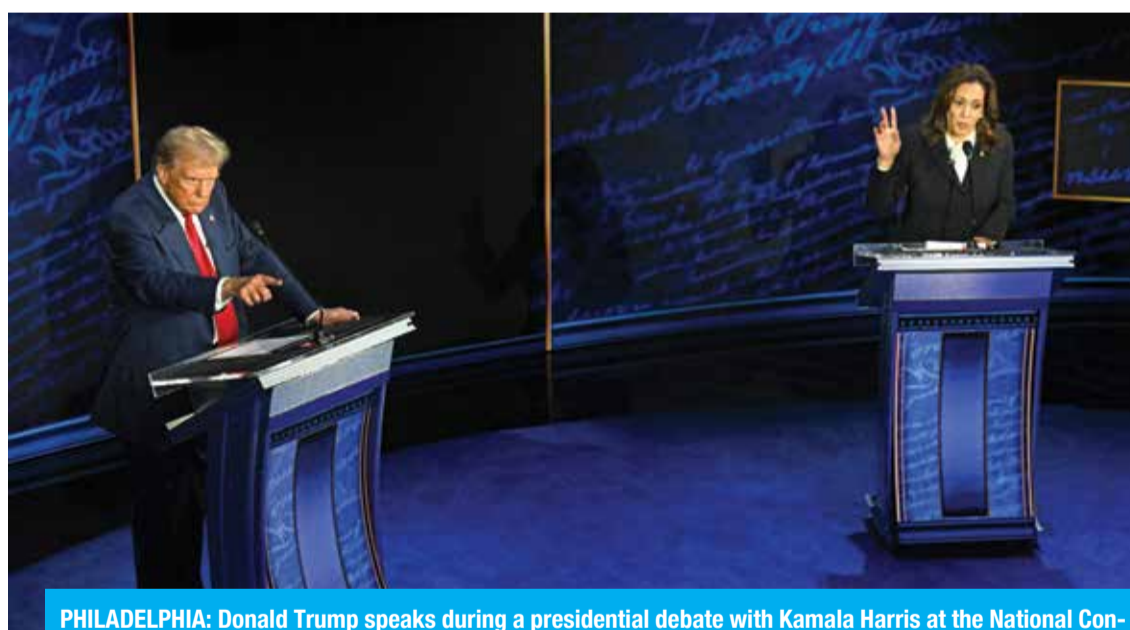
Asked if Americans were better off than four years ago, Harris did not give a direct answer. She accused Trump of leaving Democrats "the worst unemployment since the Great Depression." This is misleading. Joblessness spiked to 14.8 percent in April 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic shut down the US. By the time Trump left office unemployment was 6.4 percent.

Harris said she would offer families a tax credit of up to \$6,000 for each eligible child, as well as a \$50,000 tax deduction for small businesses, if elected president. She claimed Trump would favor billionaires and corporations over anyone else, and said the former president planned a sales tax that would hurt ordinary Americans.

Trump countered by saying President Joe Biden's administration ushered in the highest inflation in US history, quoting figures of 21 percent and as high as 60 percent on some goods. This is false. Inflation currently stands at 2.9 percent. Inflation did peak at 9.1 percent under Biden in 2022. But this was well below a historic high of 23.7 percent in 1920. Trump denied he would impose a sales tax but conceded that other countries would face trade tariffs at a minimum of 10 percent. Experts say tariffs amount to a tax on consumers who end up paying extra as the costs are passed on to them.

### Immigration and 'migrant crime'

Trump falsely claimed "millions and millions" of people from countries such as Venezuela "from mental institutions and insane asylums" are entering the US and committing crimes. He also re-aired a baseless viral claim that migrants are eating pets in places including Springfield, Ohio. "In Spring-



PHILADELPHIA: Donald Trump speaks during a presidential debate with Kamala Harris at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 10, 2024. — AFP

field, they're eating the dogs, the people that came in, they're eating the cats. They're eating the pets of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country."

Police and local authorities say there are no credible reports of such animal killings. Violent and property crimes in the US are near their lowest levels in decades, according to FBI data from 2022, the most recent year for which figures are available. A June 2023 study found a decline in incarceration rates among immigrants from all regions since 1960. Other research has found migrants commit fewer violent crimes than US citizens. FBI statistics from the first three months of 2024 also show a 15 percent decrease in violent and property crime year-over-year.

Illegal immigration during Trump's administration was higher than under former president Barack Obama's two terms. Earlier this year, during the Biden administration, illegal immigration reached a historic high. It has fallen since an executive order signed in June. Harris said Trump put politics above policy by ordering Republican lawmakers in February to kill a bipartisan bill that would have toughened policies at the southern US border, effectively denying Democrats a win on immigration in an election year.

### Abortion

Trump, who appointed three conservative judges to a Supreme Court that overturned Roe v Wade, the

precedent that guaranteed abortion access, called Democrats "radical" on the issue, claiming vice presidential candidate Tim Walz supports "execution after birth — it's execution, no longer abortion—because the baby is born is okay, and that's not okay with me." This is false.

Debate moderator Linsey Davis corrected Trump, saying: "There is no state in this country where it is legal to kill a baby after it's born." Harris added: "Nowhere in America is a woman carrying a pregnancy to term and asking for an abortion. That is not happening." Harris claimed: "If Donald Trump were to be reelected, he will sign a national abortion ban." But the former president immediately replied: "I'm not signing a ban," saying the issue is with the states.

### Ukraine

During a testy exchange on Ukraine, Trump called Harris "the emissary," saying she tried to avert the war by negotiating with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. "They sent her to negotiate peace before this war started. They sent her in to negotiate with Zelensky and Putin. And she did and the war started three days later." This claim is false. Harris did not meet Putin and she called Trump's claim a lie. As vice president, she did meet Zelensky at the Munich Security Conference in the days before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. — AFP

## Gandhi denounces 'ideological war' in India

**WASHINGTON:** Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday denounced an "ideological war" in the South Asian country, ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist party. Rahul Gandhi said there were "two completely different visions" between his Congress party and Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as he spoke to the National Press Club in the US capital Washington. "We believe in a plural vision, a vision where everybody has a right to thrive ... an India where you're not persecuted because of what religion you believe in, or what community you come from, or which language you speak," he said.

Gandhi, 54, was appointed in June to lead India's opposition in parliament, a key post that had been vacant for a decade. He is the scion of a dynasty that dominated Indian politics for decades and is the son, grandson and great-grandson of former prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru.

His party's result in the 2024 election — nearly doubling its parliamentary numbers — defied analyst expectations and forced Modi's BJP to form a coalition to govern. In Washington, Gandhi said India had a problem with participation of weaker castes, pointing in particular to Dalits — the once so-called "untouchables" in India's caste system. "So there is a very small percentage of India which is controlling the entire infrastructure," Gandhi said.

He also criticized Modi's handling of relations with China, with which India shares a 2,100 mile (3,500 kilometer) border that is a constant source of tension and occasional confrontation between the two nations. "We've got Chinese troops occupying land the size of Delhi. I think that's a disaster. I don't think Mr Modi's handled China well at all," he said. Gandhi, on a multi-day visit to the United States mainly to engage with its large Indian diaspora, has also met with US lawmakers. — AFP

## International

# Mexico approves popular election of judges in world first

## Critics concerned elected judges could be more vulnerable to pressure from criminals

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexico became the world's first country to allow voters to elect judges at all levels on Wednesday, after protesters invaded the upper house and suspended debate on the issue. Outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador had pushed hard for the reform and criticized the current judicial system for serving the interests of the political and economic elite.

The reform was approved with 86 votes in favor and 41 against, garnering the two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution, in an upper chamber dominated by the ruling Morena party and its allies. Debate on the reform had sparked mass demonstrations, diplomatic tensions and investor jitters.

Senate leader Gerardo Fernandez Norona declared a recess after demonstrators stormed the upper house and entered the chamber, chanting "The judiciary will not fall." Lawmakers were forced to move to a former Senate building, where they resumed their debate as demonstrators outside shouted "Mr. Senator, stop the dictator!"

Obrador, who wanted the bill approved before he is replaced by close ally Claudia Sheinbaum on October 1, said that protesters were protecting the interests of the political elite. "What most worries those who are against this reform is that they will lose their privileges, because the judiciary is at the service of the powerful, at the service of white-collar crime," the left leader said at a news conference.

### 'Demolition of the judiciary'

Opponents, including court employees and law students, have held a series of protests against the plan, under which even Supreme Court

and other high-level judges, as well as those at the local level, would be chosen by popular vote. Around 1,600 judges would have to stand for election in 2025 or 2027. "This does not exist in any other country," said Margaret Satterthwaite, United Nations special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. "In some countries, such as the US, some state judges are elected, and in others, such as in Bolivia, high-level judges are elected," she told AFP.

Mexico's overhaul puts it "in a unique position in terms of its method for judicial selection," Satterthwaite said ahead of the vote. In an unusual public warning, Supreme Court chief justice Norma Pina said that elected judges could be more vulnerable to pressure from criminals, in a country where powerful drug cartels regularly use bribery and intimidation to influence officials. "The demolition of the judiciary is not the way forward," she said in a video released on Sunday.

Pina said last week that the top court would discuss whether it has jurisdiction to halt the reforms, though Lopez Obrador has said there is no legal basis for it to do so. The reforms were passed last week in the lower house by ruling party lawmakers and their allies, who were forced to gather in a sports center because access to Congress was blocked by protesters.

### 'Dangerous proposals'

The United States, Mexico's main trading partner, has warned that the reforms would threaten a relationship that relies on investor confidence in the Mexican legal framework. The changes



**MEXICO CITY:** Judiciary workers and students hold a giant flag as they block the streets near the former headquarters of the Senate of Mexico during a protest in Mexico City on September 10, 2024. — AFP

could pose "a major risk" to Mexican democracy and enable criminals to exploit "politically motivated and inexperienced judges," US Ambassador Ken Salazar said last month. Financial market analysts say investor concerns about the reforms have contributed to a sharp fall in the value of the Mexican currency, the peso, which has hit a

two-year low against the dollar.

Satterthwaite has also voiced "deep concerns" about the plan, calling access to an independent and impartial judiciary "a human right essential for protecting rights and checking power abuses." "Without strong safeguards to guard against the infiltration of organized crime (in the judicial

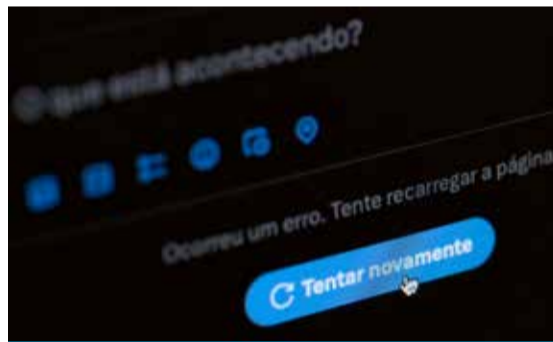
selection process), an election system may become vulnerable to such powerful forces," she warned. Human Rights Watch had urged lawmakers to reject what it called the "dangerous proposals," saying they would "seriously undermine judicial independence and contravene international human rights standards." — AFP

## Brazil's shutdown of X fans debate over free speech curbs

**BRASÍLIA, Brazil:** Is Brazil's shutdown of Elon Musk's X a drastic but necessary move in the global fight against disinformation, or pure censorship? Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes' decision to block the social media platform formerly known as Twitter has reignited a debate about where to draw the line between upholding free expression and combatting hate speech.

The shutdown affected 22 million X users in Brazil, many of whom have begun migrating to smaller platforms such as Bluesky and Threads to avoid hefty fines for using Musk's network. Moraes blocked X in its biggest Latin American market after Musk refused to comply with orders to remove dozens of right-wing accounts and then failing to name a legal representative, as required under Brazilian law.

The showdown between the Brazilian and the US billionaire, who has been accused of turning X into a megaphone for right-wing conspiracy theories, comes amid growing scrutiny in the West of X and other social media titans. In France, the Russian-born



**RIO DE JANEIRO:** This photo illustration shows a screen with a message from the social network X (formerly Twitter) that says, "An error has occurred. Try reloading the page" on September 2, 2024. — AFP

founder of the controversial Telegram app, Pavel Durov, was arrested last month and charged with failing to curb extremist and illegal content on his network, which has 900 million users.

TikTok, meanwhile, is in the crosshairs of the US Federal Trade Commission, which accuses it of violating child privacy laws. But it is arguably Musk, a self-described "free speech absolutist" who has been using his platform to whip up support for right-wingers from Brazil to Britain, who is drawing the most fire.

The European Union is considering imposing a hefty fine on X and even a shutdown for possible vio-

lations of tough new social media regulations. "Brazil has clearly joined the global debate on social media and free speech," Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond in the United States, told AFP. The shutdown of X in Brazil "reflects similar concerns about how best to regulate social media... in the US, many other democracies, and the EU," he said.

### 'Global problem'

Afonso de Albuquerque, professor of communications at Rio's Federal Fluminense University, cast the Moraes-Musk dust-up as part of a wider battle for "the sovereignty of nations" against "powerful multi-millionaires." "Elon Musk is a global problem," he told AFP.

The world's richest man, according to Forbes magazine, "bought Twitter and turned it into a political project, which has to do with his involvement in far-right networks," Albuquerque asserted. Musk has been a vociferous campaigner for the return of former US president Donald Trump to the White House. He has also been vocal in his support for far-right Brazilian ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, whose supporters staged a failed US-style attack on government buildings in 2023 following his unsuccessful re-election bid.

### Brazil's 'democracy killer'

Moraes' action against X has been applauded by the Brazilian left, including President Luiz Inacio

Lula da Silva. "Who does (Musk) think he is?" Lula asked, arguing that democracy was "not the right to lie, spread hate or violate the will of the people."

Elvino Bohn Gass, an MP from Lula's Workers' Party, accused Musk of trying to "digitally colonize" Brazil. But for Bolsonaro's supporters, the shutdown has become a cause celebre. Thousands demonstrated in Sao Paulo on Saturday in defense of "democracy" and "liberty" against what they called Moraes' "censorship." Some have disregarded the X ban, including Bolsonaro's son Eduardo, an MP, who accuses Moraes of "assassinating democracy."

### 'Political' move

Polls show Brazilians divided on the justification for the shutdown of X, with an AtlasIntel poll of over 1,600 people showing that 56.5 see it as a "political" move by Moraes. Just over 54 percent declared it "weakens democracy," despite nearly half — 49.7 percent — expressing support for Moraes.

Beyond Brazil, the standoff is closely watched by both sides in what Britain's The Economist magazine called a "culture war battleground." The Economist criticized the blocking of X as part of a growing trend to try to "censor and punish speech that should be within the law." "Only with the freedom to be wrong can societies advance slowly towards what is right," the magazine argued. — AFP

## Sparks fly at Harris-Trump...

Continued from Page 1

interview with Fox News, claiming — without evidence — that the debate was "rigged" against him. "It was a rigged deal, as I assumed it would be, because when you looked at the fact that they were correcting everything and not correcting with her," he complained.

After replacing Biden as the candidate in July, Harris rode a wave of enthusiasm through the Democratic convention that boosted her popularity and gave her record fundraising numbers. And with Biden gone, 78-year-old Trump finds himself as the candidate facing questions about his advanced age, with renewed focus on his eccentric and often rambling speeches.

But Harris, 59, had seen her polling momentum begin to stall ahead of the debate. The Democrat has been reaching to the center, showcasing a parade of anti-Trump Republicans — most recently former vice president Dick Cheney and his daughter Liz, who was thrown out of the House leadership over her opposition to the tycoon.

Trump has largely appealed to his own base, with apocalyptic warnings about migrant criminals and painting a dark picture of a country in "decline" that only he can save. In a threatening social media post at the weekend, Trump vowed to prosecute Democratic donors, lawyers and elections officials who engage in behavior he deems "unscrupulous" in November. He used the debate on Tuesday to double down on his bogus voter fraud claims from 2020.

In New York on Wednesday, Biden looked on as Harris and Trump greeted each other again, with all three wearing blue commemorative ribbons. They watched as the names of the almost 3,000 victims of the attacks were read out. "We stand in solidarity with their families and loved ones. We also honor the extraordinary heroism on display that fateful day by ordinary Americans helping their fellow Americans," Harris said in a statement. Harris heads Thursday to North Carolina — one of a handful of states expected to decide the elec-

tion, where she has erased a six-point Trump lead to draw level. Trump is due onstage in Tucson, Arizona on Thursday focusing on "our struggling economy and the rising cost of housing".

Harris' running mate Tim Walz will travel to Michigan and Wisconsin from Thursday to Saturday, as his Republican opposite number J D Vance deals with the fallout from another round of controversial remarks. The Republican vice presidential nominee amplified a false claim Monday that Haitian immigrants are abducting and eating pets in Ohio. In the debate, Trump repeated the bizarre claim, which has been debunked by local authorities.

Harris started on the front foot by surprising Trump by approaching him to shake his hand before they took to their lecterns — and then kept the upper hand. Trump repeatedly raised his voice as he hit back at the vice president on immigration and the economy, branding her a "Marxist" and blaming her for what he said were the failings of Biden's administration. Harris responded by looking on in amusement before declaring that she represents a fresh start after the "mess" of the Trump presidency — and saying: "We're not going back."

In a sign Trump realized things had not gone as well as he hoped, the former president made an unusual appearance in the debate "spin room" afterwards to speak to journalists. Swift endorsed Harris on Tuesday after her debate, calling the Democratic presidential nominee a "steady-handed, gifted leader" who could lead the country with calm rather than chaos. In a post on Instagram, Swift told her over 280 million followers that she will vote for the US vice president in the Nov 5 election, in the biggest celebrity endorsement yet for Harris. Polls show the race essentially tied between the two candidates.

"I will be casting my vote for Kamala Harris and Tim Walz in the 2024 Presidential Election. I'm voting for @kamalaharris because she fights for the rights and causes I believe need a warrior to champion them," Swift said in her post. Swift was pictured with her cat in the post, which she signed as "childless cat lady", in a dig at Vance, who in a 2021 interview called some Democrats "a bunch of childless cat ladies." Swift also said she was impressed by Harris' running mate Tim Walz. — Agencies

## Iran president deepens Iraq...

Continued from Page 1

diplomatic base at Baghdad's international airport but caused no casualties, according to the US embassy. Ties between Iran and Iraq, both Shiite-majority countries, have grown closer since the US-led invasion of 2003 toppled the Sunni-dominated regime of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Pezeshkian, who took office in July after an early election following the death of his predecessor Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash, has previously linked shoring up ties to sanctions pressure. "Relations with neighboring countries... can neutralize a significant amount of pressure of the sanctions," he said last month.

Iran has suffered years of crippling Western sanctions, especially after its arch-foe the United States, under then-president Donald Trump, unilaterally abandoned a landmark nuclear deal between the Islamic republic and major powers in 2018. Iran has become one of Iraq's leading trade partners, and wields considerable political influence in Baghdad.

Every year, millions of Iranian pilgrims travel to Iraq's Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, and Pezeshkian will also visit the shrines there during his visit. Non-oil trade between Iran and Iraq stood at nearly \$5 billion over the five months from March 2024, Iranian media reported. Iran also exports millions of cubic meters of gas a day to Iraq to fuel its power plants, under a regularly renewed waiver from US sanctions. Iraq is billions of dollars in arrears on its payments for the imports, which cover 30 percent of its electricity needs. Political scientist Ali Al-Baidar said expanding trade ties was a major goal of Pezeshkian's visit. "Iran needs the Iraqi market for its exports, just as it needs Iraq's energy imports," the Iraqi analyst said.

Washington still has around 2,500 troops in Iraq and 900 in neighboring Syria as part of an international coalition against the Islamic State group. Last winter, US-led coalition forces in both Iraq and Syria were targeted dozens of times with drones and rock-



**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian hold a joint press conference. — AFP**

et fire as violence related to the Zionist war in Gaza has drawn in Iran-backed armed groups across the Middle East. The barrage of attacks triggered retaliatory US air strikes in both countries.

On Sunday, Iraqi Defense Minister Thabet al-Abbasi told pan-Arab television channel Al-Hadath that the US-led coalition would pull out of most of Iraq by Sept 2025 and the Kurdish autonomous region by Sept 2026. Despite protracted talks, the target dates have yet to be agreed between Baghdad and Washington.

Speaking to Iraqi media, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran was "very happy that the Iraqi parliament has approved the bill that calls for withdrawal of American forces from Iraq". "Peace and security will not be achieved in our region with the presence of foreign forces," he added. Pezeshkian will also travel to the Kurdish regional capital Erbil for talks with Kurdish officials, Iran's official IRNA news agency said. In March last year, Tehran signed a security agreement with the federal government in Baghdad after launching air strikes against bases of Iranian Kurdish rebel groups in the autonomous region. They have since agreed to disarm the rebels and remove them from border areas. — AFP

## International

## Southeast Asia typhoon toll nears 200

## Hanoi river level hits 20-year high; landslide levels village, killing at least 34

**HANOI:** Residents of Vietnam's capital waded through waist-deep water Wednesday as river levels hit a 20-year high and the toll from the area's strongest typhoon in decades rose to at least 179, with neighboring nations also enduring deadly flooding and landslides. Typhoon Yagi hit Vietnam at the weekend, carrying winds in excess of 149 kilometers (92 miles) per hour and a deluge of rain that has also brought destructive floods to northern areas of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar.

The Red River in Hanoi reached its highest level in 20 years on Wednesday, forcing residents to trudge through waist-deep brown water as they retrieved possessions from flooded homes. Others fashioned makeshift boats from whatever materials they could find. "This was the worst flooding I have witnessed," said Nguyen Tran Van, 41, who has lived near the Red River in Hanoi for 15 years. "I didn't think the water would rise as quick as it did. I moved because if the water had risen just a bit higher, it would have been very difficult for us to leave," Van told AFP.

A landslide smashed into the remote mountain village of Lang Nu in Lao Cai province, levelling it to a flat expanse of mud and rocks strewn with debris and laced by streams. State media said at least 34 people had been killed in the village, with another 46 still missing.

Villagers laid dead bodies on the ground, some in makeshift coffins, some wrapped in cloth, while police with picks and shovels dug through the dirt in search of more victims. Vietnamese state media said the total death toll from Yagi — the strongest storm to hit northern Vietnam in 30 years — had risen to 179, with 145 missing across the country.

## Worst floods since 2008

Mai Van Khiem, head of the national weather bu-

reau, told state media that the water level in the Red River in Hanoi was at its highest since 2004. Forecasters said the waters in Hanoi had peaked and the river level would go down, but Khiem warned of serious widespread flooding in the provinces surrounding the capital in the days ahead.

Police, soldiers and volunteers helped hundreds of residents along the banks of the swollen river in Hanoi to evacuate their homes in the early hours as the water rose rapidly. A police official in Hanoi, who refused to be identified, said officers were going on foot or by boat to check every house along the river. "All residents must leave," he said. "We are bringing them to public buildings turned into temporary shelters or they can stay with relatives. There has been so much rain and the water is rising quickly."

Images on Tuesday showed people stranded on rooftops and victims posted desperate pleas for help on social media, while 59,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes in Yen Bai province. The United States is providing \$1 million in immediate humanitarian aid to Vietnam, its embassy in Hanoi said.

## Region-wide impact

In neighboring Laos, authorities evacuated 300 people from 17 villages in northern Luang Namtha province, deputy district chief Sivilai Pankaew told AFP. The UN's World Food Program said it was "very concerned" for the safety of communities in northern Laos, while national radio reported extensive damage to houses, roads, markets, schools and farmland. State media said at least one person had been killed and images showed rescuers working in murky brown floodwaters.

Thai authorities said four people were killed in the kingdom's northern provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai and the army had been deployed to help



**HANOI:** A man walks through flood waters in Hanoi on September 11, 2024, in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi hitting northern Vietnam. — AFP

around 9,000 families hit by floods. In Myanmar, days of rain around the sprawling low-rise capital Naypyidaw sent river levels to danger levels, the junta said in a statement. Lay Shwe Zin Oo, from the ministry of social welfare, told AFP that casualties were expected but search teams were still gathering information. Posts on social media showed people clinging to trees as the waters ran below them.

Southeast Asia experiences annual monsoon rains but human-made climate change is causing more intense weather patterns that can make destructive floods more likely. Typhoons in the region are forming closer to the coast, intensifying more rapidly, and staying over land longer due to climate change, according to a study published in July. — AFP

## Brazil's Lula visits Amazon as fire 'pandemic' rages

**BRASÍLIA:** President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced new measures on Tuesday to alleviate drought in the Brazilian Amazon, as his government faces mounting pressure to combat a "pandemic" of fires. Brazil has been parched by a historic drought that experts link to climate change, sparking fires that have spread more easily and produced clouds of smoke that have reached neighboring Uruguay and Argentina.

The country's Supreme Court has ordered immediate government action to contain what it has called a "fire pandemic", which is also threatening to destroy the biodiversity-rich wetland sanctuary of Pantanal. "We take the need to combat drought, deforestation, fires, very seriously," Lula said in the northern state of Amazonas.

Accompanied by several ministers, the president visited riverside communities living in the world's largest rainforest, which are suffering from the worst drought in 70 years to hit Latin America's biggest country. The high temperatures have dried up rivers used by isolated communities for navigation, food and water supply.

The Brazilian government announced dredging works on the Amazon River and other waterways and the delivery of water purifiers. In the state capital Manaus, Lula announced the creation of an authority to tackle "extreme climate risks". "Our focus must be on adaptation," he said.

## 'Essential services' still sparse in Libya's flood-ravaged Derna

**DERNA:** One year after a wall of water swept through eastern Libya's coastal city of Derna, killing thousands and causing devastation, reconstruction is under way but essential services are lacking, NGOs say. On September 10, 2023, extreme rainfall from hurricane-strength Storm Daniel caused two dams to burst inland from Derna, which lies some 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) east of the capital Tripoli.

The flooding killed nearly 4,000 people, left thousands missing and displaced more than 40,000 others, according to the United Nations. Near a now dry valley where people and rubble were swept away a year ago by the rushing floodwaters, cranes and trailers are busy.

Once home to around 120,000 inhabitants, Derna has become a vast construction site in which homes, schools, roads and bridges are all being rebuilt. The whitewashed facades of the city's buildings had long contrasted with the blue of the Mediterranean. Today Derna is bleak with cinder blocks and the grey concrete of unfinished buildings.

"We expected things to go better," said Mohamed Azouz. "Work is moving slowly in our street, one of the worst-hit areas. We stayed on the street for a month, a month and a half" after the disaster, he added. Libya is still grappling with the aftermath of the armed conflict and political chaos that followed the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

## 'Precarious conditions'

The country is now divided between an internationally recognized Tripoli-based government in the west, led by interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, and a rival administration in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. Belgacem Haftar, one of the field marshal's six sons, has been the figurehead for reconstruction in Derna.

Last week, he told reporters including from AFP that 70 percent of reconstruction projects in Derna had been completed. Haftar said 3,500 homes have been rebuilt, and maintenance work had been carried out on the city's power grid and in schools. But on Tuesday, in a joint statement with other groups including the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee said the flooding "has left critical gaps in essential services" even a year later.



**MANAQUIRI:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (left) looks at the Jaquiri river during a visit to Manaquiri, Amazonas State, northern Brazil on September 10, 2024. — AFP

The new authority was among Lula's campaign promises for his third government (2023-2026), devised by his environment minister, Marina Silva. "These events are going to become more and more frequent, more and more intense," Silva said. Sao Paulo, Latin America's largest city, was the world's most polluted major metropolis on Tuesday for a second day in a row, according to Switzerland-based air quality monitoring company IQAir.

Lula said "the situation is delicate" and deteriorates every year. With more than 5,000 active fire outbreaks on Tuesday, Brazil accounts for 76 percent of the areas affected by fires in South America, according to data from the National Institute of Space Research (INPE) published by official media. So far this year, some 6.7 million hectares have burned in the Brazilian Amazon, amounting to 1.6 percent of the rainforest, according to official figures. — AFP



**DERNA:** A bulldozer moves past damaged buildings during ongoing reconstruction work in Libya's eastern coastal city of Derna on September 9, 2024. — AFP

"Numerous families continue to face challenges in obtaining essential necessities, with many displaced people living in precarious conditions," the statement added. It noted that many people still have no access to clean water. It said healthcare facilities faced challenges "including poor water quality, inadequate sanitation, and hygiene supply shortages, putting both patients and workers at risk". It also said "health risks and shortages of essential medicines persist, particularly for women and children". "Psychosocial support, especially for children, needs scaling up as health workers continue to see cases of trauma, grief, and anxiety," the group added.

## Contested figures

The real number of those killed in the disaster may never be known. Families of some victims have contested the death toll announced by officials in the east. Authorities put the number of dead at around 3,800 people — based on the number of bodies buried — but the families believe many more died.

Walking alongside tombstones in a flood victims' cemetery in Derna, Achraf Mansour, a volunteer with the

Libyan Red Crescent, told AFP the main challenge had been "recording deaths". Kamal al-Siwi, head of the General Authority for the Search and Identification of Missing Persons, said that as of September 5, "we had 3,028 reports of deaths from families".

This "added to the bodies found in submerged homes, in the sea or on the banks of the wadi, making up a total of 3,734 victims". Siwi said this "difference of 700" bodies represents cases not reported by relatives, some of whom live outside the country. Far higher tolls have been reported by different NGOs, officials, and media outlets.

Libya analyst Anas El Gomati told AFP that a death toll of "14,000 to 24,000" was more plausible. He said authorities in the east have been "minimizing the death toll (in order to) minimize their culpability". Siwi said he had "heard frightening figures with media reports of between 50,000 and 100,000 deaths", which he believed were unreliable. Many victims of the tragedy have not been identified. In the cemetery where they are interred, rows of tombstones do not bear names. Instead, the people buried there have only numbers, victims of the flood whose identities remain unknown. — AFP

## 'Justice not done' 50 years after Ethiopia revolution

**ADDIS ABABA:** In his apartment in Ethiopia's capital, Ermias Woldeamlak stares at the photos of his three older brothers, all of them killed during a period of military terror a generation ago. "Elias was 20 or 21, Thomas was 19, Berhan was 18," he says. Half a century has passed, "but I still feel very sad," Ermias adds. "I remember it as fresh as something that happened yesterday."

Thursday marks 50 years since a Marxist-Leninist military junta known as the Derg seized power in Ethiopia, overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie and a monarchy that had ruled Ethiopia for 700 years. Tens of thousands died at the hands of the new regime, which ruled with callous brutality until its own overthrow in 1991.

Its 87-year-old leader Mengistu Haile Mariam lives on quietly in Zimbabwe despite being convicted of genocide and sentenced to death in absentia in 2008. For Ermias, that impunity is impossible to stomach. Without the extradition of the regime's "greatest criminal", and without financial reparations for the victims' families, "justice has not been done", said the 64-year-old documentary filmmaker.

## 'I saw a lot of killing'

Ermias was just a teenager when the revolution happened. Initially led by left-wing students, it was quickly overtaken by the army which established the Provisional Military Administration Council (its local acronym spells Derg) on September 12, 1974. Ermias's brothers were among the young rebels in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) who tried to seize back control from the army.

The clashes triggered the rise of Mengistu, a hardline colonel, to the leadership in 1977, and unleashed a two-year period of brutal repression that became known as the "Red Terror". Ermias's oldest brother, Elias, was arrested in November 1976 after being found in their grandmother's home with red paint — illegal because it was used for rebel slogans. Elias spent months in prison and was tortured, his brother says. The family would regularly bring him food and clothes until one day in March 1977, the prison guards said they should no longer bother coming. The next brother Thomas was executed on the steps of a church in Addis Ababa and his body put on public display as a warning. The family only learned of the death of Berhan, who had been in hiding, after the fall of the Derg in 1991.

Ermias says he was also imprisoned and tortured after being caught with pro-rebel leaflets. He was often left hanging with his feet and hands bound to a wooden stick, an excruciating position that left him with pain in his arms for years afterwards. "I saw a lot of killing," he recalls. "I remember seeing bodies of people who were with me the night before (who had been) taken out and killed. — AFP



**ADDIS ABABA:** Ermias Woldeamlak poses for a portrait with pictures of his brothers, Elias, Thomas and Berhan, who were killed by the Ethiopian military dictatorship known as Derg. — AFP

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2024

# UK economy stalls unexpectedly

## Manufacturing, construction drag on economy • Data blow to Starmer govt



LONDON: Shoppers walk past stores in Camden in London in this file photo. — AFP

**LONDON:** Britain's economy stagnated for a second month running in July as manufacturing output dropped sharply, an inauspicious start for the new government of Prime Minister Keir Starmer who wants to accelerate the pace of growth. Economic output showed no change in month-on-month terms in July, as it did in June, data from the Office for National Statistics showed on Wednesday.

A Reuters poll of economists had pointed to a 0.2 percent month-on-month expansion of gross domestic product. The figures are unlikely to sway expectations that the Bank of England will cut interest rates once more this year, probably in November rather than on Sept 19.

Sterling edged lower against the dollar and investors assigned a roughly 25 percent chance of a rate cut at next week's meeting, slightly higher than on Tuesday. Modest growth in the services sector, which expanded by 0.1 percent in July, was offset by declines in manufacturing and construction. Hailey Low, associate economist at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research think tank, said the economy was likely to grow through the second half of 2024, albeit at a slower pace than early in the year when it rebounded from a shallow recession.

"All eyes will undoubtedly be on the upcoming (budget), especially for any policies critical to delivering sustained long-term economic growth - an

agenda promised by the Labour government," Low said. In response to Wednesday's data, finance minister Rachel Reeves said she was under no illusion about the scale of the challenge Britain faced and said change would not happen overnight.

She pointed to the announcement on Wednesday that Amazon Web Services plans to spend 8 billion pounds (\$10.45 billion) in the United Kingdom over the next five years to build data centers as a reason for optimism. Britain's economy has grown slowly since the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding just 2.3 percent between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2024.

Economic output in July was 1.2 percent higher

than its level in July 2023, the ONS said - lower than the 1.4 percent growth predicted by economists. Starmer said he wanted the economy to achieve annual growth of 2.5 percent when campaigning in the run-up to July 4's election - a rate that Britain has not regularly reached since before the 2008 financial crisis.

Separate trade data for July showed a sharp fall in goods exports to both European Union and non-EU countries. Services exports grew only marginally. After adjusting for inflation, goods exports to non-EU countries fell to their lowest level since May 2020. Outside of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the lowest reading since September 2011. — Reuters

## Dangote refinery caught between promise, reality

**LAGOS:** When will gasoline from Nigerian tycoon Aliko Dangote's mega-refinery finally flood the home market? That's the question Nigerians are asking as Africa's most populous country battles chronic petrol shortages. Dangote — again ranked Africa's richest man by Forbes this year — says he is awaiting the green light from the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), the only entity that buys gasoline for the domestic market.

The national oil company has talked about a date of Sept 15. The mammoth plant, the continent's largest refinery, with a full capacity of 650,000 barrels per day, is supposed to be an economic gamechanger by covering all domestic fuel needs.

The refinery in Lekki on the outskirts of the economic capital, Lagos, faced multiple start-up delays but was inaugurated in May last year. It has promised to resolve the Nigerian contradiction that sees Africa's largest oil producer and an OPEC member having to rely on costly gasoline imports to keep cars running because of a lack of refineries. Yet, as the deadline for Dangote fuel to reach market approaches, optimism appears to be fading. Just as Nigerians were already struggling with high living costs, they were hit with a surprise 45-percent increase in petrol prices by the state-run company.

NNPC did not respond to an AFP request for comment. "These are policy issues that have to be jointly agreed between us and NNPC," a Dangote spokesman said, about talks on getting the fuel to market. "For now, let's keep our fingers crossed." The other big question is how much Dangote's petrol will cost Nigerians. "The issue of pricing is the biggest elephant in the room," analyst Ayotunde Abiodun of Nigerian firm SBM Intelligence said. "Many Nigerians reasonably expect that the Dangote refinery's supply of refined products should come at a cheaper price," he added, pointing to the refinery theoretically cutting out import costs.

But "market realities" such as "global oil prices, the cost of oil supply and refining margins" make that unlikely, at least in the short term, he said. Dangote must also cover production costs and repay the debt used to build the giant refinery. It "will most likely prioritize markets where it can make higher profit margins" and sell some gasoline outside the country, Abiodun said.

When he came to power in May 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu officially ended the costly fuel subsidy that had kept petrol prices low for decades. Investors welcomed the reform but the price of petrol for Nigerians then tripled. — AFP

## Afghanistan to begin work on huge gas pipeline

**ISLIM CHESHMA, Turkmenistan:** Afghanistan said Wednesday work would begin on a \$10 billion gas pipeline traversing South Asia as officials joined dignitaries in neighboring Turkmenistan to celebrate its completion on that side of the border. Progress on the TAPI pipeline — running through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India — has been repeatedly delayed because of security issues in conflict-ravaged Afghanistan.

"From today the operations will start on Afghanistan's soil," Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said at the ceremony in comments broadcast by Afghan state television. At the border ceremony in Islam Cheshma in Turkmenistan, officials on both sides, including Afghan Prime Minister Hassan Akhund, hailed the project. "This project will benefit not only the economies of the countries participating but also the countries of the whole region," Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedow said in a video broadcast live at the ceremony.

In the Afghan border province of Herat, a public holiday was declared to mark the occasion, with posters celebrating the project plastered around the capital of the same name. The pipeline will see around 33 billion cu m of natural gas each year extracted from the Galkynsh gas field in southeast Turkmenistan. It will be pumped through a 1,800-km

## Amazon to invest £8 billion in UK in boost for new govt

**LONDON:** US tech giant Amazon is to invest £8 billion (\$10.5 billion) in Britain over the next five years, creating thousands of jobs via its web services arm, the company and UK government announced Wednesday.

The announcement is a welcome boon for Britain's recently elected Labour government, which has put firing economic growth at the heart of its pledge to "rebuild" the country. The investment — to build, operate and maintain data centers in the UK — could contribute £14 billion to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and "support" more than 14,000 jobs annually across the supply chain, Amazon said. It is the firm's latest announcement of a large investment in a European country by its Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud computing division, and comes amid debate within the European Union about "cloud" computing services.

"This £8 billion investment marks the start of the economic revival and shows Britain is a place to do business," UK finance minister Rachel Reeves said in a statement.

"I am determined to go further so we can deliver on our mandate to create jobs, unlock investment



MARY, Turkmenistan: Afghan and Turkmen engineers attend the inauguration ceremony of the TAPI pipeline project near the zero point between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan on Sept 11, 2024. — AFP

pipeline traversing Afghanistan, including Herat and Kandahar in the south, before crossing into restive Balochistan province in Pakistan and ending in Fazilka in Indian Punjab.

Pakistan and India will each purchase 42 percent of the gas deliveries, and Afghanistan 16 percent, while Kabul will also benefit from lucrative transit fees of around \$500 million per year, according to Afghan media. Work on the Turkmen side began in 2015 and was initially scheduled to start in Afghanistan in 2018, but has been repeatedly delayed. India's commitment to the pipeline has also previously been questioned over its relationship with Pakistan and its already easy access to liquefied natural gas markets.

### Jobs and cheap gas

The ceremony was an opportunity to simultane-

ously launch various bilateral projects, including a fiber-optic line to Herat, an electricity line, and the inauguration of a railway bridge. In a country plagued by unemployment, TAPI "will provide jobs for 12,000 people in Afghanistan," the government spokesman Mujahid told AFP. Neither Afghan nor Turkmen officials have provided details on the financing or the expected date for TAPI to come online.

However, Swapnil Babele, an analyst with the research group Rystad Energy, expects further delays "as a lot of work remains to be done and the question of future financing is unclear." "We expect it to be operational only in the next decade," he told AFP. For the three recipient countries, the pipeline will have the advantage of "delivering gas cheaper than liquefied natural gas and ensuring consistent supply". — AFP



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves (center) speaks to students during a visit to Silverstone University Technical College at Silverstone Circuit, in Towcester, central England, on Sept 11, 2024. — AFP

and make every part of Britain better off. "The hard work to fix the foundations of our economy has only just begun." Underscoring the challenge the government faces, official data showed on Wednesday that Britain's economy posted zero growth for a second consecutive month in July.

The new Labour government is hosting an international investment summit in London on October 14, as part of its plans to boost economic growth. In particular, it wants to capitalize on the country's tech sector. Amazon said the money will be spent ex-

planning the operations of its AWS subsidiary.

The e-commerce behemoth is seeking to capitalize on the rising demand for cloud computing capacity such as server space. UK government agencies and companies such as airline Easyjet, bank Natwest and Sainsbury's supermarket already use AWS data centres, like many of the world's top firms. "The next few years could be among the most pivotal for the UK's digital and economic future," said Tanuja Randery, AWS Vice President and Managing Director, Europe, Middle East & Africa. AWS' expansion would help "organizations of all sizes across the country increasingly embrace technologies like cloud computing and AI to help them accelerate innovation, increase productivity, and compete on the global stage", she added.

In recent months, the subsidiary has announced it is set to invest tens of billion of euros in Germany, Spain and France. It comes amid discussions in the EU about a "European sovereign cloud" which would allow the storage and processing of data online without going through American technology giants. Amazon employs 75,000 people in Britain, at more than 100 sites. It said in its press release that it invested £56 billion in the country between 2010 and 2022. The company announced last month that it had doubled group quarterly profits, driven by the cloud and AI. AWS revenue grew 19 percent to \$26.3 billion in the second quarter. Amazon is the world's number one cloud provider but has fallen behind the two other giants in the sector, Microsoft and Google, in generative AI. — AFP



## Business

# Indonesia's dwindling middle class seen dimming economic outlook

## Increase in layoffs and drop in job opportunities incarcerate growth

**KARAWANG, Indonesia:** Rahmat Hidayat lost his job when the shoe factory he worked for closed down last year in the industrial town of Karawang in Indonesia's West Java. The 44-year-old now earns less than half of what he used to make by selling grilled meatballs. Unable to afford his wife's diabetes medication, Rahmat picks herbs to make a tonic instead.

Like Rahmat, millions of working middle class Indonesians have become poorer, largely due to an increase in layoffs and a drop in the number of job opportunities since the pandemic. This trend bodes ill for the outlook for Southeast Asia's biggest economy - household consumption accounts for over half of gross domestic product - as well as the widely held investment thesis that an expanding middle class will drive Indonesia's ambition to become a high-income nation by 2045. It also poses a challenge for the incoming administration of President Prabowo Subianto, who won a February election by a landslide on promises to boost economic growth and create 19 million jobs. Prabowo takes office on Oct 20.

"Pushing the economy to grow higher with weak consumption is difficult," said Mohammad Faisal, an economist at the Jakarta-based Center of Reform on Economics. The government classifies those who spend between \$132 to \$643 a month as middle class, based on a World Bank criteria. This group is key to economic growth as their spending accounts for nearly 40 percent of private consumption, and more than 80 percent if combined with the aspiring middle class, who spend \$57 to \$132.

The size of the middle class, however, has dropped from 21.5 percent of the total population in 2019 to 17.1 percent in 2024, according to official data released last month. Even though Indonesia's economy has bounced back after the pandemic, with growth of around above 5 percent a year since 2022 amid generally low inflation, this shrinking middle class is likely to pressure future growth, as the government will have to contend with lower tax revenues and a possibly more subsidies, said Jahen Rezki, an analyst from the University of Indonesia. "In the long run, if the middle class dwindles, it will certainly be a big burden for the state," he said.

One of the main reasons for the demise of the middle class is the changing labor market. A large portion of the foreign investment coming into Indonesia has targeted industries such as mining, which are becoming much less labor intensive as more cutting edge technology is deployed.

Also, stronger competition from lower cost destinations such as China, especially in the textile sector, has squeezed factories, leading to layoffs that the textile association said were the worst in the last decade. Prabowo's brother and adviser Hashim Djojohadikusumo said the incoming government will help the middle class by creating millions of new jobs from projects like the \$28 billion free meals program and the building of millions of homes.

"We want to create a lot of small, medium and micro entrepreneurs, for example through our housing program. We want to build 3 million units of houses, in villages and cities. That's to create middle



**JAKARTA:** Indonesian woman chooses clothes to purchase from a street vendor at a traditional market in Jakarta. — AFP

class," he told Reuters recently. However, how much the next government is able to spend on welfare schemes might be limited, especially next year when a large amount of government debt is due to mature, said Teguh Yudo Wicaksono, an economist at Islam Internasional Indonesia University.

For former factory worker Rahmat, the best help the government can give is a handout he can use to

expand his food business, as it has become increasingly difficult to find a job. His wife Fatimah said her children often ask for their favorite spicy meat dish, but she can only afford to feed them instant noodles with eggs most of the time. "I could only tell my kids to please wait until dad got his fair compensation from the factory, we will cook a delicious meal again," she said. — Reuters

## India's bid to match China's factory heft gets a reality check

**NEW DELHI:** India's push to become a factory titan has hit a snag: to become a credible alternative to China for global firms, it first needs to warm up to its long-time rival. Ties between the world's two most populous countries have been strained since a deadly Himalayan border clash in 2020, slowing the exchange of capital, technology and talent, despite exploding demand for electric vehicles, semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

The Modi government's heightened vetting of all Chinese investment over this period effectively turned away billions of dollars from the likes of BYD, Great Wall Motor and created new layers of red tape for Indian firms with Chinese stakeholders. But now, New Delhi is looking to loosen some of these restrictions as businesses struggle to scale up manufacturing, even with a host of government subsidies designed to boost local production.

"There is a realization that you cannot be part of any major supply chains, especially in high technology products and certain areas like solar cells, EVs, where it is not possible for you to do anything without being part of Chinese supply chains," said Sushant Singh, lecturer at Yale University, who has also been a researcher for public policy think tanks in India. Even busi-

nesses that have supported barriers on Chinese imports acknowledge the need for key inputs from up north.

Naveen Jindal, head of one of the country's largest steel firms Jindal Steel & Power and a federal lawmaker, has backed tariffs on Chinese steel but also sees the need for a pragmatic approach to trade. "A lot of steel companies import equipment and technology from China," Jindal said. "China is the world's largest producer of steel and in certain areas they are very good, but not in every area."

Now, after four years of restrictions on Chinese investments and visas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is looking to pivot closer to the Asian rival and breathe new life into his ambitions to "Make in India". "The government is considering easing investment rules that were introduced in 2020 for countries that India shares land border with as we need more investments," an official privy to government discussions told Reuters.

New Delhi is now planning to add a clause that investments from firms with up to 10 percent Chinese shareholding will no longer require government approval, a move that could help global companies that have supply chain partnerships with Chinese firms easily invest in India. To address



**MALUR, India:** A worker collects packaged products for dispatch at the Flipkart fulfillment centre in Malur on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Sept 10, 2024. — AFP

security concerns, the government is also planning to set up a post-investment monitoring framework driven by crime and fraud investigation agencies and the banking regulator. The move would encourage greater Chinese investment, which analysts say is critical to India joining global supply chains in high-technology sectors such as solar cells, EVs and battery manufacturing.

The proposed easing is still being pushed by Modi's office with various sticking points between government ministries being ironed out, a second official, with direct knowledge of the matter said. Following industry lobbying, India has already eased visa issuance for Chinese nationals and is expediting visa approvals to Chinese

engineers for sectors that get federal subsidies to manufacture locally.

It has likely approved nearly 2,000 short-term visas to Chinese professionals, who accounted for most applications between November last year and July this year, another government official said. "In the visa process, there is rationality. On the ground it has not translated yet but the mindset shift has happened," Pankaj Mohindroo, head of the Indian Cellular and Electronics Association said. Indian foreign minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said this week the country is not "closed to business from China" but noted the issue was rather in which sectors and on what terms Beijing did business, without elaborating. — Reuters

## EU, China should build bridges, avoid trade war: Sanchez

**KUNSHAN, China:** Spanish Prime Minister Pedro said on Wednesday there does not need to be a trade war between the European Union and China, and the two sides should seek to find a compromise around planned tariffs. Sanchez made the remarks while speaking at an event at Mondragon Industrial Park in Kunshan, a city neighboring Shanghai.

He was addressing the European Commission's move to conduct an anti-subsidy investigation into EVs made in China and the EU weighing hefty tariffs. The EU has revised some duties or lowered final proposed tariffs, which members are expected to vote on in October.

This week, China renewed negotiation efforts seeking to overturn the proposed duties on Chinese EVs. When asked whether Spain would reconsider its vote on EU tariffs on Chinese made EVs, Sanchez said: "I have to be frank, we have to reconsider our position, all of us. Not only the member states but also the commission." "We don't need another war, in this case a trade war. I think we need to build bridges between the European Union and China, and from Spain we will be constructive and try to find a compromise between China and the European Commission," Sanchez said.

Sanchez met local business people and entrepreneurs at an event before the press conference. He also spoke to local government officials. He was in China for a regular state visit. On Monday, in a meeting with China's President Xi Jinping, he also said he hoped the European Union could avoid a trade war with China. "The government of Spain wants to consolidate the growth of our trade relations and investment with China, with a focus on green and innovative industries and avoiding that trade and geopolitical tensions damage them," Sanchez said on Wednesday.

"Nevertheless, as I said earlier, I believe that it is undeniable that these relations need to be balanced." — Reuters



**NAIROBI:** Kenyan police officers walk past passengers waiting at a closed door at the departures of the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) in Nairobi on Sept 11, 2024 amid a strike by the Kenyan Aviation Workers Union. — AFP

## Kenya airport staff strike disrupts flights

**NAIROBI:** Hundreds of passengers were left stranded at Kenya's main airport on Wednesday as staff went on strike over a planned takeover by an Indian company. The walk-out by the Kenyan Aviation Workers Union began at midnight, severely disrupting flights at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA).

Long queues of passengers were outside the airport and there were lines of cars trying to access the area, AFP reporters said. The union said the strike would continue until the government scrapped a plan to lease the airport to India's Adani Group for 30 years in exchange for a \$1.85-billion investment.

"The strike is on and all shifts have been suspended," union leader Moses Ndiema told workers at the airport. "Adani must go, that is not optional," he said.

The Kenya Airports Authority said "minimal operations" had resumed at 7:00 am (0400 GMT) but

data from Flight Radar showed long delays and several cancellations for flights in and out of the airport.

Critics say the plan to lease JKIA to Adani will lead to job losses for local staff and rob taxpayers of future airport profits. Freight and passenger fees from the airport account for more than five percent of Kenya's GDP. One stranded passenger, Elvis Mushengu, told AFP he had been waiting through the night. "They closed the doors at around 12 (midnight)," he said. "We don't know who's doing the screening or what the procedure is... We've not slept, we're just tired."

Kenya's government has defended the Adani deal as necessary to refurbish JKIA. It is one of Africa's busiest hubs, handling 8.8 million passengers and 380,000 tons of cargo in 2022-23, but is often hit by power outages and leaking roofs. Adani would add a second runway and upgrade the passenger terminal, according to the Kenya Airports Authority. Tourism is a major contributor to the Kenyan economy, accounting for more than 10 percent of GDP in 2022, according to the government.

The Law Society of Kenya and the Kenya Human Rights Commission won a delay on the Adani deal from the High Court on Monday, arguing that it lacked "transparency". A date for a final court verdict on the deal has yet to be set. — AFP

## Power struggle: Serbia eyes nuclear energy to fuel future

**BELGRADE, Serbia:** Time stands still at Serbia's Vinca nuclear facility, where the decommissioned Yugoslav-era reactor is a testament to the fears generated by the controversial energy source.

For decades, the research reactor and the surrounding facility have been stuck in another era. But a new push to revitalize Serbia's stalled nuclear energy sector may see the country embrace the technology again. Three years after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine, then Yugoslavia shuttered its nuclear program and shut down its lone reactor in Belgrade's suburbs. Serbia has long relied on its plentiful sources of cheap coal to power its economy, even as it blackened its skies with the capital Belgrade regularly ranked as one of the most polluted cities during the winter.

It has come at a cost. Nearly 70 percent of Serbia's electricity comes from coal-fired power plants, which caused an estimated 15,000 deaths in 2021 alone linked to pollution, according to a report by the European Environment Agency. Facing a 2050 EU deadline to transition away from coal, officials are now considering whether to lift the long-standing ban on building nuclear power plants in the Balkan country.

In late August, Serbia's Ministry of Mining and Energy opened public consultations for proposed changes to the country's energy law, which includes lifting the moratorium on nuclear power.

The facility at Vinca is a reminder of what could have been. An antique phone sits next to an emergency button used to manually activate the safety system amid a sea of analogue glass dials that once measured the pulse of the reactor and its surroundings. Visitors to the facility must still adhere to strict controls when entering the reactor's hall, which scientists today use mostly for educational purposes.

For proponents of nuclear power, Serbia stands at a crossroads. "When considering whether to say 'yes' or 'no' to a nuclear power plant, we must be aware that nuclear power plants surround us," Dalibor Arbutina, director of Public Company Nuclear Facilities of Serbia (NFS), told AFP.

Arbutina points to the use of nuclear power by many of Serbia's neighbors, including Hungary which has an active reactor just 80 kilometers (50 miles) from its northern border.

"We are in the same risk zone as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, but they benefit from their nuclear plants, while we get nothing," Arbutina added. But going nuclear will be a long and costly process, with a government study saying a cautious estimate for the launch of a new nuclear facility would likely take up to two decades. "It is a painful transformation that Serbia will have to undergo," said Slobodan Bubenjic from the Institute of Physics at the University of Belgrade. The process of reversing the ban alone will likely be lengthy and require navigating complex political bureaucracy. — AFP



**BELGRADE:** Dalibor Arbutina (left), the director of the Public Company Nuclear Facilities of Serbia (NFS) and another employee in the control room of the former Yugoslav era research nuclear reactor at Serbia's Vinca nuclear facility near capital Belgrade. — AFP

## NBK INTERNATIONAL REPORT

# Global monetary easing ramps up as US focus shifts to labor market

## Central banks mull measures to ward off any possible recession threat

**KUWAIT:** With inflation edging down closer towards targeted levels, key central banks have shifted their focus away from rising prices and towards protecting the economic growth outlook and warding off any recession threat. For now, the outlook for a soft landing in the US looks promising, with the labor market still quite solid and the Fed set to start cutting rates in September. In the eurozone, the ECB is set to lower rates again in September against a backdrop of softer though still positive economic growth but still-elevated services inflation. In Japan, the BoJ faces a difficult balancing act as its pursuit of higher interest rates at a time of cuts overseas risks a further bout of financial market instability. Finally, economic indicators in China are weakening, but the authorities are yet to offer forceful policy support.

### Fed to start cutting rates

US GDP growth rebounded strongly to 3 percent (annualized) in Q2 from 1.4 percent in Q1, and leading indicators point to another decent 2 percent rise in Q3. Private consumption was particularly strong in Q2 (2.9 percent from 1.5 percent in Q1) and July's solid retail sales (+1 percent m/m) suggests still-resilient consumer activity.

In contrast, real estate activity is weak, manufacturing continues to shrink, and the ISM services index remains on a general downtrend and is only marginally above 50. Moreover, the labor market continued to gradually weaken as indicated by data on job growth, job vacancies, and the unemployment rate. For example, rolling three-month average job gains fell to 116K/month in August, the weakest since the onset of the pandemic, and the unemployment rate rose by an eye-catching 70 bps since July 2023 to stand at 4.2 percent in August 2024.

On the other hand, consumer price pressures continue to abate, with July's PCE inflation down to 2.5 percent y/y and core to 2.6 percent (versus 4.2 percent one year ago), inching closer to the 2 percent target and pushing the Fed to switch focus to its other mandate, i.e. maximum employment.

The Fed is near certain to start an easing cycle in mid-September, delivering a 25 bps interest rate cut although an outsized 50 bps cut is not completely off the table. The futures market is currently indicating a cumulative 100-125 bps in cuts by year-end, although this carries a high degree of uncertainty. The overriding question continues to be whether a hard landing for the US economy can be avoided or not, and contrary to historical precedent at a time of sharp monetary tightening, a hard landing still looks, for now, avoidable.

Meanwhile, the presidential race is looking to be a very tight one, keeping financial markets on edge until election day. A Harris win will likely result in minor variations to Democrats' current policy and plans, while a Trump win will inject a more pro-business edge (through lower taxes and regulations), but also extra unpredictability to US policy in terms of trade, immigration and global geopolitics, with far-reaching implications on the economic outlook.

### ECB to cut rates again

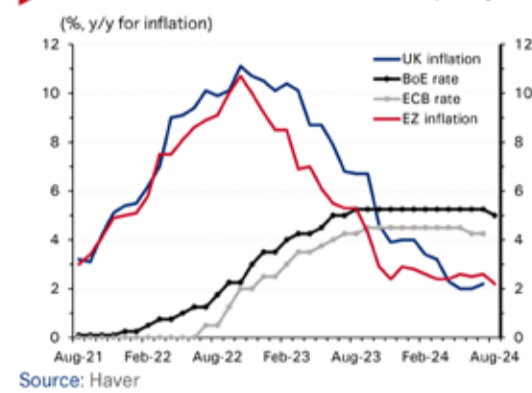
By contrast, the eurozone economy managed only moderate GDP growth of 0.2 percent q/q in Q2, slightly below the 0.3 percent recorded in Q1. The service sector continues to lead the recovery with

Chart 1: US job gains and unemployment rate



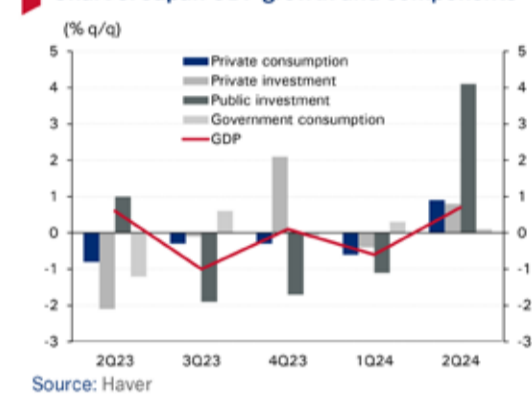
Source: Haver

Chart 2: Eurozone/UK inflation and policy rates



Source: Haver

Chart 3: Japan GDP growth and components



Source: Haver

Chart 4: China GDP growth



Source: Haver

the services PMI rising in August to 52.9, a three-month high, helped by the Paris Olympics, while the manufacturing PMI remained, now for two years, in contraction territory. Trade conditions remain vulnerable given tensions with China, posing risks especially to export-heavy Germany. On a more positive note, consumer price inflation fell to 2.2 percent y/y in August from a 2.4-2.6 percent range in the previous six months, the softest rise in around three years.

However, core inflation remained relatively sticky at 2.8 percent y/y in August, with services inflation rising to a 10-month high of 4.2 percent. The recent data and outlook on inflation and growth have strengthened the market's expectation of another 25bps interest rate cut by the ECB, which now seems likely, at its upcoming September 12 meeting, following a first 25bps cut in June.

In the UK, the economic recovery picked up steam, with GDP growth at a robust 0.6 percent q/q in Q2, following a solid 0.7 percent rise in Q1. Moreover, the Bank of England (BoE) recently upgraded the 2024 growth forecast to 1.2 percent from 0.5 percent earlier. Recent PMI activity indicators were strong, with the services index rising to a four-month high of 53.7 in August while manufacturing hit a two-year high of 52.5. Still, sustaining this growth momentum over coming quarters will be challenging given still-elevated interest rates, fiscal tightening and a looser labor market. Meanwhile, core inflation decelerated to a 34-month low of 3.3 percent y/y in August and headline inflation has been in a 2.0 percent-2.2 percent range since May. The BoE cut its policy rate in July by 25 bps to 5 percent, but struck a cautious stance about fu-

ture rate cuts due to still-elevated services inflation (5.2 percent in July) and high but softening wage growth (5.1 percent y/y in the three months to July). Following a landslide victory by the Labour Party in the July election, new PM Kier Starmer has pledged to boost growth. But the new administration faces a stretched fiscal position and is looking to plug a disguised fiscal hole (£22 billion, or 0.8 percent of GDP) allegedly inherited from the previous government. It will spell out details of "painful" required fiscal measures in its late October budget.

### BoJ eyes policy normalization

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) hiked, in late July, its key interest rate to "around 0.25 percent" from a range of 0 percent to 0.1 percent and pledged to halve its monthly bond purchases by Q1 2026, in a move towards normalizing its ultra-loose monetary policy. The hawkish BoJ decisions, coupled with US recession fears after a poor July jobs report, triggered extreme volatility in Japanese and global financial markets, including a near 20 percent crash in Japanese stocks across just two days, as so-called 'carry trade' investments were unwound amid a surging yen. This prompted BoJ officials to announce that they will not be raising interest rates if "financial markets are in an unstable state", which has helped restore relative calm in financial markets for now. Recent growth data was relatively robust, with GDP increasing 0.7 percent q/q in Q2, the fastest since Q1 2023, more than reversing Q1's 0.6 percent contraction with private consumption rising following April's wage increases. Leading indicators suggest that the strength could somehow continue in Q3, with the composite PMI

climbing in August to the highest since May 2023. Inflation stood at 2.8 percent y/y in July, steady for the third straight month but above target, while core inflation ticked up to 2.7 percent. Overall, the current economic trajectory is allowing the BoJ to remain committed to gradual policy normalization, potentially delivering another interest rate hike either this October or in January 2025.

### China outlook weak

The Chinese economy grew a softer-than-expected 4.7 percent y/y in Q2, below market estimates and the 5.3 percent recorded in Q1. Early Q3 indicators remain lackluster, suggesting slowing economic momentum. Specifically, July showed softening y/y growth in industrial production, fixed asset investment and credit. Moreover, growing international trade disputes have exerted renewed pressure on the export outlook, with Europe and Canada joining the US in imposing additional tariffs on some China-made products. While retail sales showed some improvement in July, growth is still significantly below the pre-COVID trend. In addition, consumer price inflation was a modest 0.6 percent y/y in August while wholesale prices have been in deflation for nearly two years. Finally, the unemployment rate ticked up to 5.2 percent in July with youth unemployment spiking while the general PMI for August (50.1) is the lowest since December 2022. On the policy front, the central bank cut interest rates on several policy instruments by 10-20 bps in July, but kept them steady in August. The soft economic outlook, including ongoing property sector woes and an uncertain global backdrop, require more forceful and broad-based stimulus measures that have been unforthcoming so far. Hence, the government's "around 5 percent" growth target for 2024 is looking optimistic.

### India's strong growth trajectory

India's economic growth slowed to 6.7 percent y/y in Q1 FY2024-25 from a solid 7.8 percent the previous quarter on a sharp slowdown in government expenditure owing to elections during the quarter. However, underlying activity remained strong, with private consumption growth rising to a seven-quarter high of 7.6 percent from 4.3 percent in the previous quarter. Moreover, with monsoon rains being above-normal so far this season, agricultural production, and consequently, rural consumption is likely to pick up further, boosting growth prospects for the remainder of the current fiscal year (expected at around 7 percent). Meanwhile, inflation fell to a nearly five-year low of 3.5 percent y/y in July from 5.1 percent in June, mainly due to base effects, but will likely pick up as food price rises continue to be elevated on a monthly basis. As a result, the central bank has maintained its cautious stance, keeping the repo rate steady for the ninth consecutive time at 6.5 percent in August. On the political front, Narendra Modi took the PM office for the third straight time, albeit with a lower parliamentary majority than his previous two terms. The ruling party's fewer seats in parliament has already resulted in the government back-tracking on several items of its agenda, such as the proposed pension reforms, switching back to a defined-benefits mechanism, in addition to cancelling the overhauling of a capital gains tax mechanism.

## Argentina sees energy investment reaching \$15bn next year

**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentina's government expects investments in the country's energy sector to reach up to \$15 billion in 2025 and \$16.5 billion in 2026 thanks to its market deregulation push, Energy Secretary Eduardo Rodriguez Chirillo said on Tuesday. The estimated spending includes additional funds that flow from the country's RIGI investment promotion regime, which range from \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion per year, according to Rodriguez.

Speaking at an event organized by Shell, Rodriguez argued the measures will lead to a better business climate to attract investment. "We're at record production," Rodriguez said. "These (new) rules will help shore up investments that are already in development." The government of libertarian President Javier Milei has promoted a series of reforms aimed at reducing state intervention in the economy, including a major deregulation push. The policies seek to facilitate energy exports, in addition to deregulating local prices along with offering more access to foreign currency.

Rodriguez said planned energy investments are currently seen around \$12.5 billion in 2025 and \$14 billion in 2026. The RIGI scheme could tack on up to \$2.5 billion each year, he said.

Shell alone invests between \$500 million to \$600 million in Argentina a year. That could increase under the RIGI mechanism and when exchange restrictions are limited, country head German Burmeister said. "The RIGI is a way to attract investments that would not otherwise arrive," he told reporters, without providing a figure for how much the firm's investments could increase.

Shell currently produces 50,000 barrels of oil a day in Argentina and plans to hit 70,000 barrels by the end of 2025. Thanks to increased activity at the Vaca Muerta formation - the world's second-largest shale gas reserve and fourth-largest for shale oil - Argentina will also be able to reverse a long-running energy deficit, Daniel Gonzalez, a senior energy and mining official, said. — Reuters

## Canada's Q3 growth seen much slower than BoC forecast

**OTTAWA:** Canadian gross domestic product in the third quarter is likely to fall well short of the Bank of Canada's forecast, possibly coming in at less than half the estimate, with growth flagging and joblessness still rising, economists said this week. In July, the BoC had forecast Canada's annualized GDP in the third quarter would grow by 2.8 percent, led by falling borrowing costs, growth in exports and increase in household spending. Economists' lower expectations for growth reflect constrained consumer spending in recent weeks and the difficulty of Canada's growing ranks of immigrants to find jobs.

A slide in growth projections, especially if substantial, could force the central bank to make larger interest rate cuts than previously envisioned to prevent the economy from slipping into recession in the coming quarters, according to a half dozen economists interviewed by Reuters.

"I think it's looking less likely that the Bank of Canada's Q3 projections are actually going to take hold," said Andrew DiCapua, a senior economist at Canadian Chamber of Commerce. In the third quarter ending Sept. 30, Canada will probably record gross domestic product growth of around 1 percent to 1.5 percent on an annualized basis, DiCapua said, adding it looked more likely that the bank would be making deeper cuts.

A slew of disappointing economic indicators coming from Statistics Canada on GDP and the labor force have pushed economists to update their models. Last month, Statscan said economic growth in

## US to discuss economic support for Bangladesh

**WASHINGTON:** US officials will hold talks with Bangladesh's interim government to see how the United States can support the country's economy and development, the US State and Treasury departments said on Tuesday. An interim government led by Nobel Peace



VANCOUVER: A container ship sits in Burrard Inlet in front of the coast of North Vancouver. — AFP

June was flat and is likely to be unchanged for July. The labor force survey last week showed that unemployment hit 6.6 percent in August, a seven-year peak, excluding the pandemic period. The number of hours worked by employees in August also contracted, hitting income levels.

"We have seen months and months for now that essentially the labor market has flattened out, no growth," said Pedro Antunes, chief economist at Conference Board of Canada, an independent think tank. "That's suggesting a very weak growth for Q3," he said, adding that bank's forecast could fall short by half or more.

Household spending in Canada, which contributes 57 percent to the GDP, slowed to 0.2 percent in the second quarter as higher interest rates put a damper on consumer purchases. High mortgage costs and rent increases have eaten into disposable incomes. Population growth at a faster rate than economic expansion

laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in last month with the aim of holding elections in the South Asian nation after the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina following deadly protests.

A State Department statement said Donald Lu, assistant secretary for South Asia, will be part of a US delegation holding meetings with the Bangladeshi interim government. Lu will also visit India during the Sept 10-16 trip. The State Department said the delegation would include representatives from the Treasury, USAID, and the Office of the US Trade Representative. "US and Bangladeshi officials will discuss how the United States can support Bangladesh's

economic growth, financial stability and development needs," the statement said.

A US Treasury spokesperson said the delegation was expected to meet with high-level members of the interim government, including Yunus, foreign affairs adviser Mohammad Touhid Hossain, finance and commerce adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, and Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan Mansur. "The United States is optimistic that, by implementing needed reforms, Bangladesh can address its economic vulnerabilities and build a foundation for continued growth and increased prosperity," Brent Neiman, assistant Treasury secretary for international finance, said in a statement. — Reuters

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2024



Cosplayer Xu Yunting poses after applying makeup to transform to Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night', before going on a 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai. — AFP photos



Cosplayer Xu Yunting (right), dressed as Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night' and Feng Xinyu make a cake at a pastry shop during their 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai.

# YOUNG CHINESE WOMEN HIRE FEMALE COSPLAYERS TO PLAY DREAM MEN



Cosplayer Xu Yunting (right), dressed as Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night' and Feng Xinyu pose for a selfie at a restaurant during their 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai.



Cosplayer Xu Yunting (right), dressed as Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night' and Feng Xinyu are seen at a shopping mall during their 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai.



Cosplayer Xu Yunting (left), dressed as Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night' and Feng Xinyu are seen at a metro station during their 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai.

During her final years of high school, Chinese teenager Xu Yunting found an unusual way to make some pocket money — transforming herself into male video game characters and taking their female devotees on dates. The trend, called “cos commissioning”, has gained traction in China recently, with social media posts garnering millions of views as an increasing number of young women use their purchasing power to engineer a meeting with their dream man in real life.

One early morning in Shanghai last month, Xu carefully inserted contacts to enlarge her irises and adjusted a tangerine wig to transform into “Jesse”, a character from the romance quest mobile game “Light and Night”. A tall and sensitive musician, he is one of five characters that woo players throughout the game — and for client Feng Xinyu, a vivacious 19-year-old, the ideal partner. “I don’t have a boyfriend because I’m not interested in 3D men,” Feng told AFP, using a term for real-life men as opposed to those on the page or screen. “I like anime characters a little bit more, they’re more appealing to me.”

“Light and Night”, made by tech giant Tencent and aimed squarely at young women, promises a “brand-new interactive experience of highly immersive love”. Players like Feng, who form strong emotional connections with characters in such games, are known as “dream girls” — and cos commissioning takes the immersion to the next level by dragging those 2D beaus off the screen and into the real world. Feng has commissioned Xu twice before, for a fee of around \$70. Last month, she spent \$2,800 on a multi-day trip with another Jesse cosplayer to a different province. But she decided she preferred Xu’s portrayal and hired her for a third date. “We really click,” Feng said. “She’s just like the character from the game, it feels like we were meant to be together.”

### ‘Reconstructing gender rules’

Feng was waiting for Xu at a metro station, and grinned in unabashed delight when she spotted her. The two appeared relaxed, holding hands and chatting happily as they headed to their first activity. Their date — all planned and paid for entirely by Feng — lasted all day, beginning with tea and ending with a hotpot meal and a romantic stroll. At both a doll-painting workshop and cake-decorating class they attended, they were one of many cos commission pairs.

Staff at the latter business told AFP they had noticed more and more couples coming in over



Cosplayer Xu Yunting (left), dressed as Jesse, a male character from the video game 'Light and Night' and Feng Xinyu visit a crafts shop during their 'cos commissioning' date in Shanghai.

the past year — sometimes dozens on busy days. Part of the appeal, experts studying the phenomenon say, is that it gives young women a way to perform an idealized heteronormative relationship.

Conservative social attitudes towards women remain widespread in China, often reinforced by state media and popular culture. Aside from assuaging safety concerns, hiring a female cosplayer ensures a level of equality and understanding not necessarily guaranteed in a real-life relationship. “I don’t think it’s important what gender the person being commissioned is,” Fudan University’s Tian Qian told AFP.

“What is important is that (the cosplayer) is a vessel, because the client needs a vehicle for their emotions.” Another academic, Zhou Xizheng, wrote that cos commissioning allows women “to gain a voice that is fully respected by the opposite sex... responding to, breaking, and reconstructing the gender rules of the real world.”

### ‘Low-quality guys’

At the cake-decorating class, Feng leaned over the

table, fondly watching Xu pipe generous amounts of icing onto a sponge cake. Afterwards, Xu gently helped Feng remove her apron, modelling Jesse’s gentlemanly behavior. “The guys in the games are all quality guys,” said Xu. “I think (clients) will be able to improve their requirements in real life in terms of what they want from a man, so that they don’t settle for low-quality guys.”

Her mother Fang Xiuqing admitted her initial reaction when she learned what Xu was doing was: “How could this happen to my daughter?” But she has since come around to the idea. “I don’t think it’s a profession, it’s a hobby,” said Fang. “She gets enjoyment from it, and she also brings joy to others.” Fudan University’s Tian said cos commissions can act as “emotional sustenance.” “Although this is a paid interaction, it still gives a sense of being seen, which has a certain healing effect to it.” — AFP

## ‘Piano Lesson’ premiere in Toronto a family affair for Denzel

Denzel Washington and his family celebrated the screening in Toronto of Oscar hopeful “The Piano Lesson,” the latest Hollywood adaptation of an August Wilson play in which the entire clan was involved. Washington’s son Malcolm makes his feature directorial debut and elder son John David stars in the movie, which tells the story of a family struggling to make peace with its past and confront the legacy of slavery. Washington himself is a producer of the film, wife Pauletta and daughter Olivia have small roles, and daughter Katia is an executive producer.

“I’m happy, a proud father,” Washington said in a Q&A session after the screening. For 33-year-old Malcolm, who received a warm ovation at the film’s conclusion, “this was such a beautiful time for us all to come together, but it became something much bigger than our own family.” “This is a story of ancestry, of lineage, and dealing with the August Wilson

canon at all, you’re tying yourself into a much larger lineage there.” “The Piano Lesson,” written in 1987 and set in the 1930s, is part of Wilson’s so-called “Pittsburgh Cycle,” a series of 10 plays that aimed to explore the African American experience in the 20th century.

It debuted at the Telluride festival in Colorado before making its way over the border for a splashy international premiere in Canada’s largest city. The film will stream on Netflix on November 22. At the center of the story is an heirloom piano, hand-carved with images of their ancestors and imbued with the family’s difficult history.

John David Washington, 40, plays Boy Willie, who wants to sell the instrument to buy land and get ahead, while sister Berniece (Danielle Deadwyler) insists that they keep it. The two actors turn in electrifying performances as they duel over the fate of the piano, while confronting issues of race, spirituality and acceptance of the past.

Deadwyler, who many believe



(From left to right) John David Washington, Katia Washington, Pauletta Washington, Malcolm Washington, and Denzel Washington attend the premiere of “The Piano Lesson” during the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival at Princess of Wales Theatre on September 10, 2024 in Toronto, Ontario. — AFP photos

was snubbed for an Oscar nomination for her performance in “Till” (2022), is on nearly every expert’s shortlist for a best supporting actress nod this time around, according to awards prediction site Gold Derby. The film is adapted specifically from a recent Broadway revival of Wilson’s play, and retains much of the same cast, including Samuel L. Jackson as the de facto patriarch.

Denzel Washington is no stranger to Wilson’s work; this is the third of his plays that he has helped bring to the big screen. The Oscar winner directed and starred in “Fences” (2016), for which Viola Davis won an Academy Award, and then produced “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” which took home two golden statuettes. The Toronto International Film Festival runs through Sunday. — AFP



Producer Denzel Washington attends the international premiere of “The Piano Lesson”.



Actor Ray Fisher attends the international premiere of “The Piano Lesson”.

Lifestyle

# IKEA opens the first IKEA dedicated to business in Kuwait



Marino Maganto, CEO for IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco.

IKEA, the leading brand in life at home, announced the opening of its first IKEA showroom dedicated to business in Kuwait. Located in Shuwaikh, the new business-customer meeting point has opened where the first IKEA was established in 1984! Celebrating IKEA roots in Kuwait, this new showroom is created to inspire and support the many businesses in Kuwait.

The inauguration was held Tuesday evening in the new IKEA showroom and was chaired by Marino Maganto, CEO for IKEA Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco, and attended by many distinguished guests. "Thank you for joining us on this important day. This day marks a very important milestone in our history. First, because in the year of our 40th birthday we are going back to our roots. We are opening our latest customer meeting point, where the first IKEA store opened in Kuwait in 1984. Second, because we are proudly presenting our first showroom dedicated to inspiring and supporting the vibrant business community of Kuwait. IKEA is a well-known brand to create a better



home, however, not everyone knows that at IKEA we have a division that caters to all business needs, from A to Z," said Maganto.

"Our new IKEA for Business showroom not only stands for our commitment to inspiration but also for our dedication to supporting businesses in Kuwait. Whether you have an existing business that you want to renovate, or you are about to start a new project, whatever the size of your business or the sector you are in; the IKEA you love for your home, is here to help your dream business comes true," explained Maganto.

IKEA for Business offers end-to-end solutions to the different and unique needs of all sectors, including residential, hospitality, retail, education, services, health and beauty, and many more. "Small or big, new or well-established, whatever your project, we've got you covered! Any idea you have in mind, we are with you from the beginning to the end: from imagining your space, to planning, designing and selecting your preferred furnishing solutions. We make it all a reality in an easy and convenient way, so you can focus on what is important, making your business a success story," said Maganto.

"Come visit our showroom to be inspired by all the business solutions, and ideas that we have prepared for you. The different businesses are represented in a



very relevant way, including a complete and affordable offer of products and services, and most importantly, a fully dedicated business team that will be there to support you all the way," added Maganto.

"IKEA for Business showroom is a go-to place to explore exclusive business spaces, get inspiration from real stories and displays, experience "ready for

your business" range and discover a seamless experience tailored just for you. A dedicated account manager will support you all the way in your project and you will have access to our business exclusive services and flexible payment options," said Maganto.

"Furnishing your themed hotel spa, finishing the renovation of your office, launching your new

apartment building, refreshing your café or salon during a special season, planning school projects for the new year, or furnishing your chalet for your family gathering, has never been easier. IKEA for Business has it all, under one roof, offered from businesspeople to businesspeople! Let's talk Business!" concluded Maganto.

## Mount Fuji crowds shrink after Japan brings in overtourism measures

Fewer climbers tackled Mount Fuji during this year's hiking season, preliminary figures show, after Japanese authorities introduced an entry fee and a daily cap on numbers to fight overtourism.

Online reservations were also brought in this year by officials concerned about safety and environmental damage on the country's highest mountain.

The number of climbers fell by 14 percent between early July - when the volcano's hiking trails opened for the summer - and early September, according to the environment ministry.

To calculate its preliminary figures, the ministry used infrared devices installed on the four trails.

It comes despite Japan welcoming a record influx of foreign visitors, with nearly 18 million tourists entering the country in the first half of 2024.

Officials raised the alarm last year about overtourism at the once-peaceful pilgrimage site, with the local governor of Yamanashi region warning that "Mount Fuji is screaming".

This summer the environment ministry counted around 178,000 climbers, compared to more than 200,000 the previous year and before the pandemic.

Gates to the trails were closed on Tuesday, marking the end of the hiking season. The preliminary data runs to September 4 and will be updated on a later date, a ministry official told AFP on Wednesday.

The mountain is covered in snow most of the year but during the summer many trudge through the night to see the sunrise from the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) summit.

This year, an entry fee of 2,000 yen (\$14) plus an optional donation was charged on the popular Yoshida Trail, with numbers capped at 4,000 per day.



Workers install a barrier to block the sight of Japan's Mount Fuji emerging from behind a convenience store to deter badly behaved tourists, in the town of Fujikawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture. — AFP photos



A tourist poses for photograph with Mount Fuji in front of a convenience store in the town of Fujikawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture on May 21, 2024.

The three other trails remained free. Concern had been raised that some climbers were sleeping on the trail or starting fires for heat, while others became sick or injured after trying to reach the summit without breaks. Mount Fuji is about two hours from

central Tokyo by train and can be seen for miles around. The majestic mountain is a symbol of Japan that has been immortalized in countless artworks, including Hokusai's "Great Wave". — AFP

## Sony to release PlayStation 5 Pro on November 7

Sony said Tuesday it would launch an upgraded version of its flagship games console with better graphics and AI capabilities on November 7, calling it PlayStation 5 Pro. The Japanese firm's gaming division has endured tough times this year, with PlayStation 5 missing its sales targets and PlayStation announcing 900 job cuts in February. The gaming industry is struggling with a wider downturn as the investment that poured into the sector during Covid has largely dried up. In a short video announcement, PlayStation's lead architect Mark Cerny showed off the capabilities of the new console, which will retail for \$700 and 800 euros, roughly 250 euros more than the current PlayStation 5.

He trumpeted hardware improvements that allowed games to run much faster, with better rendering of light and an AI system that provided sharper images. "Simply put it's the most powerful console we've ever built and a worthy edition to the PS5 family," he said. Analyst Daniel Ahmad of Niko Partners pointed out that Sony had already tried to boost sales of its previous console by releasing a pro version in 2016. But the PlayStation 4 Pro had limited impact, Ahmad wrote on X, because it was "a premium product tailored for a niche audience." "What will really drive PS5 sales is a lower price on the base models (and games like GTA6)," he wrote, referring to the forthcoming "Grand Theft Auto" sequel.

Sony announced in an accompanying statement that PlayStation 5 games would be playable on the new console. The statement also listed titles that would be available in enhanced versions, includ-



ing "Assassin's Creed: Shadows", "Hogwarts Legacy" and "Marvel's Spider-Man 2." "We are proud of the impact that PS5 has made on the gaming industry," said Hideaki Nishino, CEO of Platform Business Group at Sony Interactive Entertainment. He said the console had given game creators an opportunity to "realize their vision and reach millions of players around the world", adding that the creators would now be able to "unleash the possibilities" of even more advanced hardware. Alongside its longer-term troubles, PlayStation has endured a topsy-turvy few weeks. The Japanese publisher pulled space-based shooter game "Concord" just two weeks after its release earlier this month after disastrous sales figures. The game had reportedly taken eight years to develop. On the same day, "Astro Bot", a game exclusive to its console developed by a subsidiary in Japan, received a rave reception by reviewers. The review aggregation site Metacritic posted a score of 94 out of 100 for "Astro Bot", placing it among the best-reviewed recent releases. — AFP



Designer Michael Kors walks the runway finale during Michael Kors Collection Spring/Summer 2025 Runway Show at The Shed on September 10, 2024 in New York City. — AFP photos



Models walk the runway during the Michael Kors Spring/Summer 2025 fashion show.

# Michael Kors brings Italian air to New York Fashion Week

**F**ashion designer Michael Kors brought an Italian air to New York Fashion Week, presenting his Spring/Summer 2025 collection Tuesday as the brand remains embroiled in a legal battle with competition authorities. The show at a Manhattan cultural space followed the start of hearings in New York this week over the US antitrust agency seeking to block a merger between Michael Kors' parent company, Capri, and

Tapestry, whose brands include Kate Spade. Well away from the US Federal Trade Commission case, Michael Kors sought to celebrate 35 years collaborating with Italian artisans through a setting of volcanic rocks reminiscent of the country's southern islands. Flowers dominated the catwalk, whether printed or more often hand embroidered, adorning

a denim blue skirt, a short-sleeve sweater, or a crinkled dress with a belt hanging to one side. A trench coat was also worn crumpled, paired with white shorts and a wide-brimmed hat. The US designer boasted a "rustic" collection with "glamour", using "artisanal textures" such as raffia or lace on leather. Michael Kors said he drew inspiration from the "dark romanticism" of the Netflix series "Ripley",

which is based on the celebrated novel by Patricia Highsmith - "The Talented Mr. Ripley" - to design low-cut shirts worn in a feminine way. He also said he was inspired by the "warmth and sensuality" of fashion and celebrity photographer Herb Ritts, who was known for his shots of Madonna including the cover of her "True Blue" album. — AFP

NEW YORK FASHION WEEK





# Colombia down Argentina, Brazil stunned in World Cup qualifiers

## Chile slump to a 2-1 loss at home to Bolivia

**MONTEVIDEO:** Colombia avenged their Copa America final defeat with a 2-1 victory over Argentina while Brazil crashed to a 1-0 defeat against Paraguay in South American qualifying for the 2026 World Cup on Tuesday.

Skipper James Rodriguez buried a nerveless 60th-minute spot-kick to seal a hard-fought win for Colombia over the reigning world champions, who were without injured captain Lionel Messi.

It was sweet revenge for Colombia, who were beaten 1-0 by Argentina in a bitterly disappointing Copa America final loss in Miami two months ago.

"I don't think I've ever scored against them — there's a first time for everything," Colombia captain Rodriguez said of his winning spot-kick.

"We want to get used to playing finals. Today was just another game, but against a team that has won everything — this victory tastes even better."

The victory at Barranquilla's Metropolitan Stadium lifted Colombia into second place in South America's 10-team qualifying competition with 16 points from eight points, just two points behind leaders Argentina.

Colombia, backed by a passionate home crowd, took the lead in the 25th minute when Rodriguez chipped a cross to the back post where Yerson Mosquera rose to head home.

But three minutes after the interval, the visitors drew level when a misplaced pass from Rodriguez was pounced upon by Nicolas Gonzalez, who raced away and slotted past advancing Colombia keeper Camilo Vargas.

Twelve minutes later, though, Colombia restored their lead in controversial fashion. Nicolas Otamendi clattered Daniel Muñoz with a wild challenge and after several minutes, Chilean referee Piero Maza was

sent to the VAR monitor and awarded a penalty.

Rodriguez stepped up and confidently slotted home, sending Argentina's penalty specialist Emiliano Martinez the wrong way. Colombia striker Jhon Duran missed a great chance to make it 3-1 when he was found unmarked in the centre of the box but fired straight at Martinez.

### Brazil stumble

Despite the defeat, Argentina remain comfortably on course for a place at the 2026 World Cup which is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

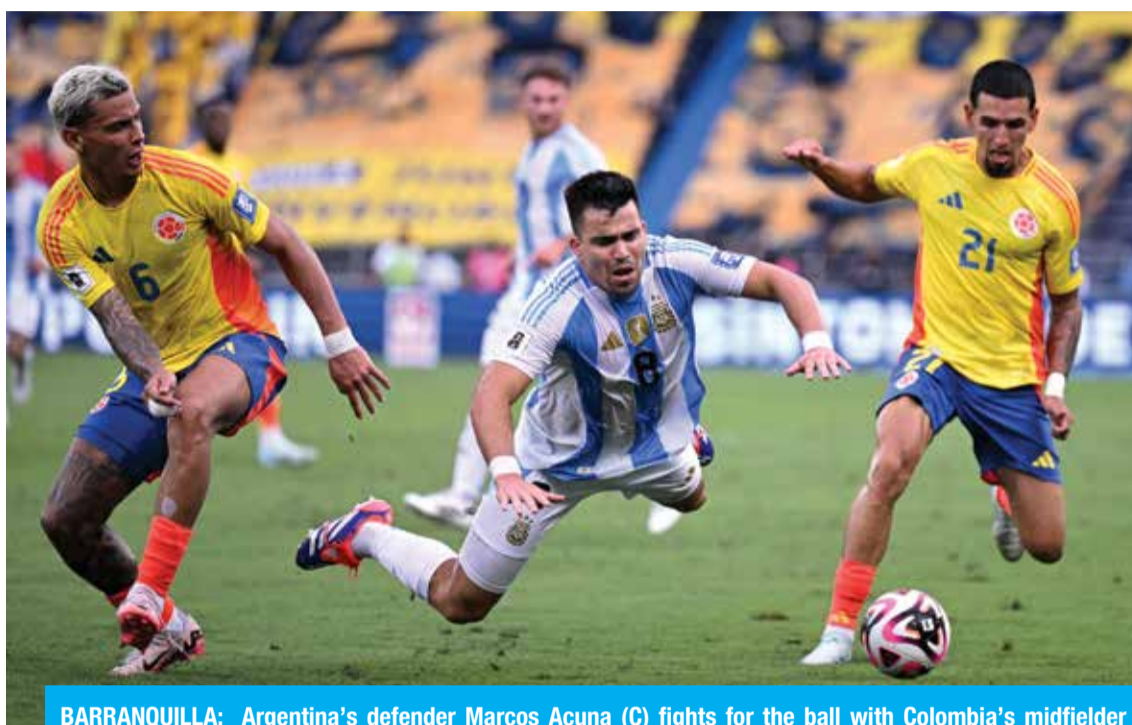
With the tournament expanded to 48 teams, the top six finishers in South American qualifying will win a berth to the finals. The seventh placed team in qualifying goes into an inter-confederation playoff, with the bottom three teams eliminated.

Five-time world champions Brazil meanwhile continued their unconvincing qualifying campaign with a 1-0 defeat against Paraguay in Asuncion.

Inter Miami midfielder Diego Gomez — who is reportedly due to join Premier League side Brighton at the end of the season — scored the game's only goal, crashing a long-range shot in off the post in the 20th minute. The defeat leaves Brazil in fifth place in the standings on 10 points, leading by goal difference from Venezuela, who drew 0-0 at home to Uruguay on Tuesday.

Paraguay meanwhile moved into seventh place on nine points after just their second win of the qualifying campaign. Elsewhere on Tuesday, Chile's hopes of qualifying suffered another body blow after they slumped to a 2-1 loss at home to Bolivia.

After winning back-to-back Copa Americas in 2015 and 2016, the Chileans failed to qualify for



**BARRANQUILLA:** Argentina's defender Marcos Acuna (C) fights for the ball with Colombia's midfielder Richard Rios (L) and defender Daniel Muñoz during the 2026 FIFA World Cup South American qualifiers football match between Colombia and Argentina. — AFP

both the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. The prospect of missing out on a third straight tournament loomed closer after goals from Carmelo Algranaz and Miguel Terceros handed Bolivia a 2-1 win.

The victory left Chile languishing in ninth place in the standings with just five points from eight games as Bolivia climbed into eighth, trailing sev-

enth-placed Paraguay on goal difference.

Ecuador meanwhile boosted their qualification hopes with a 1-0 win over Peru in Quito thanks to a goal from veteran striker Enner Valencia. Ecuador sit in fourth place in the standings with 11 points from eight games. Peru remain bottom of the table with just three points from 10 games. — AFP

## Tearful S Korea star denies ridiculous China match-fixing claims

**SUWON:** South Korean World Cup player Son Jun-ho broke down in tears Wednesday as he denied match-fixing and accused China of blackmail after they banned him for life. Son, who played for Shandong Taishan in the Chinese Super League, was accused by the Chinese Football Association (CFA) of participating in match-fixing and bribery, and was detained in May last year.



Son Jun-ho

The midfielder, who appeared in three of South Korea's four matches at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, returned to South Korea in March. But he was one of 43 people banned for life this week by Chinese authorities over alleged gambling and match-fixing in the domestic game.

A weeping and visibly emotional Son told reporters that his arrest had been an "overwhelming shock". He said he was threatened by Chinese police and his family, including his children, were used as bargaining chips to force him to confess.

"The Chinese police presented ridiculous charges," he said. "They threatened that if I didn't admit to the charges, my wife would be arrested through the foreign ministry and brought to the same detention centre to be investigated with me," he said.

He said he was not given adequate Korean translations or access to a lawyer, and when he realized Chinese police were accusing him of bribery, he was "dumbfounded". "I said I hadn't done anything like that," the 32-year-old said, constantly having to stop talking to wipe away tears.

Son was held on "suspicion of accepting bribes by non-state employees", without being given details and he said his family were used to extract a confession. "While showing me pictures of my daughter and son on my phone, they pressured me, saying: 'What did the children do to deserve this?'" Son told reporters. He said police told him: "If your wife comes here too, how will the kids manage? Don't you think your children want to see their father? So admit it quickly."

Son added that he was offered a deal by Chinese police, who told him if he admitted his guilt he would be released quickly. "Overwhelmed with fear and concern for my family, I had no choice but to admit to charges I didn't even understand, just to return to my family quickly," he said. He said Chinese police should release the audio files of his interrogation to show "how they coerced a confession from me. I want to clear my name with absolute transparency. The only evidence they had was my false confession, obtained through the intense pressure of their early interrogation tactics." — AFP

## Salah scores in Egypt romp, S Africa win, Rwanda hold Nigeria

**JOHANNESBURG:** Liverpool star Mohamed Salah scored as Egypt cruised to a 4-0 victory over Botswana on Tuesday as matchday two of 2025 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying drew to a close.

Other African powerhouses had mixed fortunes with South Africa snatching a last-gasp 3-2 win in South Sudan while Nigeria were held 0-0 in Rwanda. Jean-Philippe Krasso, a late addition to the Ivory Coast squad, opened the scoring as the defending champions beat Chad 2-0 in Yaounde to lead Group G by three points from Zambia.

East Africa had cause for celebrations with Kenya beating Namibia 2-1 and Tanzania edging Guinea 2-1 to collect maximum points from away outings. Travel difficulties meant Botswana arrived in Francistown from Mauritania only seven hours before facing record seven-time AFCON title-holders Egypt, captained by Salah.

The home team fell behind after only four minutes when a Salah shot was parried by goalkeeper Goitseone Phoko and Mahmoud Hassan — popularly known as Trezeguet — netted. Trezeguet struck again to give the visitors a 2-0 half-time advantage that was increased on 56 minutes when Salah tapped in a cross that evaded four defenders.

Mostafa Fathy completed the rout in added time to give Group C leaders Egypt a maximum six points, having launched their campaign last Friday with a 3-0 win over Cape Verde. Goalkeeper Fiacre Ntwari starred for Rwanda as they held 2024 AFCON run-



**FRANCISTOWN:** Egypt's striker #10 Mohamed Salah and Botswana's #3 Thatayone Dithokwe fight for the ball during the 2025 CAF Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) group C football match between Botswana and Egypt. — AFP

ners-up Nigeria before a vibrant Kigali crowd that included President Paul Kagame.

Ntwari repeatedly defied the Super Eagles, especially Ademola Lookman, the lone African among the 30 nominees for the 2024 Ballon d'Or men's award. Lookman claimed a hat-trick when Atalanta defeated Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 in the UEFA Europa League final in Dublin this year.

When the Nigerian star did get the ball in the net in Kigali, from a header midway through the first half, the goal was disallowed because a teammate had committed a foul. Rwanda are 92 places below Nigeria in the world rankings, but their commitment and energy were commendable, and the Wasps deserved the point. Nigeria have four points, Benin three, Rwanda two and Libya one in Group D. — AFP

## USA draw with New Zealand as Pochettino awaits

**MIAMI:** If Mauricio Pochettino had any illusions about the scale of the task that awaits him as newly-appointed head coach of the United States, Tuesday's 1-1 draw with New Zealand would have set him straight.

The friendly in Cincinnati, against the 94th-ranked team in the world, continues a miserable run of form for the Americans who have now managed just one win in their last seven games — all held on home soil. Substitute Christian Pulisic looked to have earned a victory with his 69th-minute strike but some hesitant defending led to a fortunate leveller from Ben Waine with a minute of regulation time remaining.

Former Tottenham Hotspur and Paris

Saint-Germain coach Pochettino was named as the man to lead the USA into the 2026 World Cup just half an hour before the kick-off in Cincinnati. His arrival, to replace Gregg Berhalter, fired in July after a disappointing Copa America campaign, cannot come soon enough for a USA team that has lost its way, less than two years out from the World Cup they will co-host with Mexico and Canada.

Saturday's friendly defeat to the Canadians, their first on home soil since 1957, followed losses to Panama and Uruguay in the Copa America, where the USA failed to get out of their group. There was never any question of interim coach Mikei Varas being handed the job with talks with Pochettino having progressed several weeks ago and injuries and the low stakes for the game meant he experimented with his line-up.

AC Milan winger Pulisic, the team's captain and talisman, began the game on the bench with Varas opting for an attacking trident of Folarin Balogun, Ricardo Pepi and Haji Wright. But while

dominant for large stretches, the lack of fluidity and creativity in the team was evident again as chances were rare in the opening 45 minutes.

Pepi thought he had broken the deadlock in the 20th minute but his well-taken effort was ruled out for a foul in the build-up. Marlon Fossey, the Standard Liege right-back making his first appearance, was attacking impressively down the flank and set up Pepi for another effort which flashed just wide of the far post. Fossey was one of the few real bright spots for the Americans against the workmanlike Kiwis along with midfielder Aidan Morris. Pulisic was introduced for Wright in the 57th minute and made a swift impact.

After Balogun and Brenden Aaronson had gone close, Pulisic provided a precise finish after a smart passing move involving Pepi and Balogun for his 31st goal in 73 appearances. But the Americans were denied the morale-boosting win when their backline failed to deal with a long ball forward



**PASADENA:** Mexico's Cesar Montes (up) and Zealand's Joe Ball fight for a header during the international friendly football match between Mexico and New Zealand at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena. — AFP

and Mark McKenzie's attempted clearance struck Waine and looped past helpless keeper Matt Turner. Pochettino will be in charge for October friendlies against Panama in Austin and Mexico in Guadalajara and

Pulisic is looking forward to a new chapter for the team. "Obviously difficult results for us and it's not a great feeling, but I think moving forward it's time to turn a page and we really have to pick it up a level." — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

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

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

#### Hospitals

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

### Change of Name

I, Aliakbar (current name in passport) Aliakbar holder of Indian Passport No. M5454723 having permanent address Sagwara - 314025, Rajasthan, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Aliakbar (given name) and Popat (surname).

(#6164 12/09/2024)

## Kuwait, Iraq play out goalless draw in World Cup qualifiers

### Japan coach slams Bahrain fans after World Cup qualifying rout



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's forward #10 Faisal Zayid heads the ball during the 2026 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification football match between Kuwait and Iraq at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait City.



Kuwait supporters cheer with a national flag for their team before the 2026 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification football match. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Abdellatif Sharaa and Agencies

**KUWAIT:** The much-anticipated World Cup Asian FIFA World Cup qualifying match between Kuwait and Iraq ended in a goalless draw. 60,000 fans jammed Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium early Tuesday afternoon although the match was scheduled for 9:00 pm. The match was in the second round of World Cup 2026 qualifiers during which Kuwait raised its total points to two while Iraq now has 4 points equaling those with Jordan and South Korea.

It was obvious that the Iraq team suffered due to the absence of its top scorer Ayman Hussein, then seven minutes in the match defender Sulaqa was red carded after fouling Kuwait's forward Yousuf Nasser. Kuwait had control as far as possession was concerned for significant time as the Iraqis resorted to defending but did not create any threats on the goal.

Iraq's team was highly dangerous when executing free kicks. The second half was better for Kuwait and had few chances, and then the referee gave Kuwait a penalty kick only to reverse his decision after referring to VAR.

Kuwait's coach attempted to take advantage of Iraq's 10-man team with several substitutions but Iraq defended very well and came out with a precious point out of the encounter.

Kuwait's team included players Mohammad Duham, Yousuf Nasser, Ahmad Al-Dhafiri, Faisal Zayed, Redha Hani, Sultan Al-Enezi, Mushari Ghanam, Khalid Ibrahim, Fahad Al-Hajiri, Sami Al-Sane and goal keeper Suleiman Abdelghafour.

The Iraqi team included goalkeeper Jalal Hassan, Zaid Tahseen, Merkhass Dousky, Rabeen Sulaqa, Mustafa Saadoun, Ahmad Yahya, Ameer Al-Amari, Ibrahim Bayesh, Yousuf Al-Ameen, Zaidan Iqbal, and Ali Alhammadi.

Meanwhile, Australia football head coach Graham Arnold said his side were "extremely disappointed" after their goal-drought continued into a



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah (left), Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, Defence Minister, and Interior Minister tours Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

second World Cup qualifier, this time leading to a 0-0 draw with Indonesia in Jakarta.

The Socceroos dominated in front of almost 80,000 fans at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium on Tuesday, but sit second-from-bottom of Group C with a single point from their opening two qualifying games. Australia again failed to score following their shock 1-0 defeat at home to Bahrain last week in their opening qualifier.

The Socceroos had 19 shots against Indonesia and dominated possession to force 15 corners, but still could not hit the back of the net. "It was a vastly improved performance, but we're extremely disappointed because how many chances do we create? How many chances do we give?" said an exasperated Arnold. "It's been a common theme for over a year."

Arnold praised his team for dominating the game despite the hostile home crowd, but rued the result. "The boys put in the effort. They all admitted their



An Iraqi supporter holds a message of gratitude to Kuwait before the 2026 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification football match.

performance wasn't good enough in the first game (against Bahrain)," he added.

Earlier, Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu hit out at Bahrain fans for trying to distract his players with laser pointers and booing his country's national anthem during their World Cup qualifying clash.

Japan won 5-0 in Manama to continue their impressive start to the Asian qualifying third round, following last week's 7-0 home thrashing of China. But Moriyasu was incensed by fans who aimed a green laser light at striker Ayase Ueda's eyes as he prepared to take a first-half penalty, which he scored.

The coach was also left fuming after home fans booed the Japanese anthem before the game at

Bahrain's National Stadium on Tuesday. "Different countries have different cultures and worldviews and I want to accept that diversity," said Moriyasu.

"But I would like to see an end to the booing that happened during the national anthems at today's game, and the attempts to obstruct my players, which could have done them physical damage."

Ueda kept his cool despite the distraction and tucked his penalty past goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfalla to open the scoring in the 37th minute.

The Feyenoord striker doubled Japan's lead early in the second half before Hidemasa Morita notched a brace and Koki Ogawa scored a fifth to complete the rout.

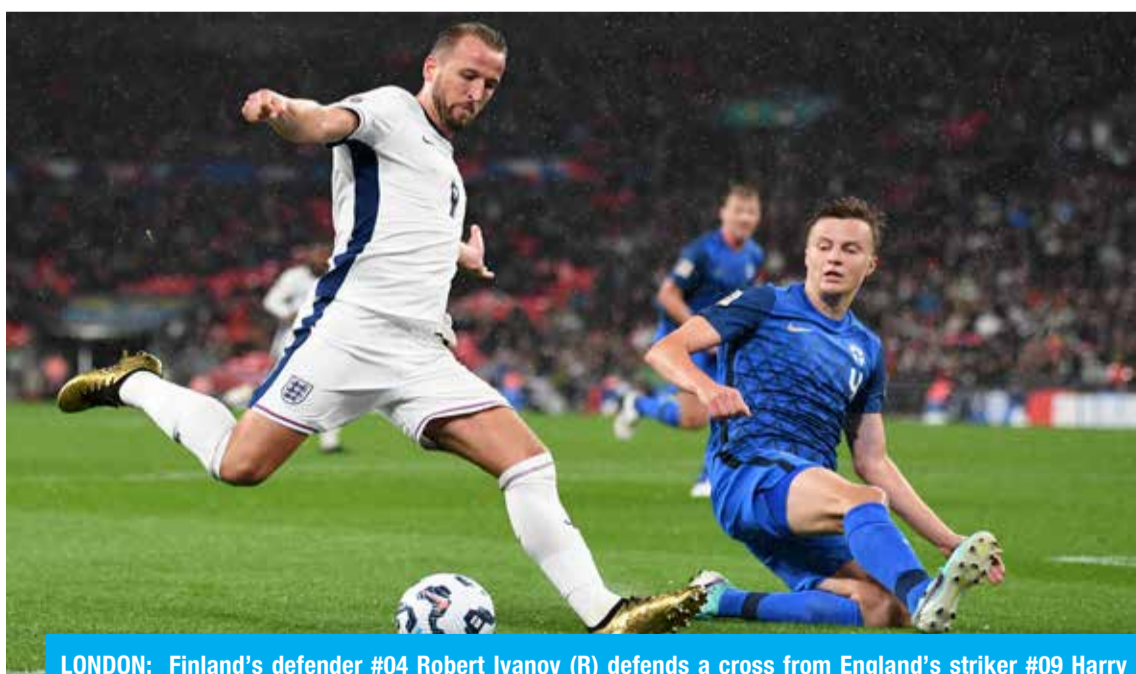
## Kane celebrates 100th cap with brace as England sink Finland

**LONDON:** Harry Kane celebrated his 100th England cap in memorable style as the striker's superb double sealed a 2-0 win against Finland in the Nations League on Tuesday. England captain Kane struck with a pair of eye-catching finishes in the second half at Wembley to mark the latest landmark in his remarkable career.

The 31-year-old is the 10th man to reach a century of England appearances, joining the likes of David Beckham and Bobby Moore in the exclusive club. Goalkeeper Peter Shilton holds England's caps record with 125 appearances, while Wayne Rooney is the country's most capped outfield player on 120, and it would be little surprise if Kane passed both of them.

He is only the third England player to score on their 100th appearance after Rooney against Slovenia in 2014 and Bobby Charlton against Northern Ireland in 1970. Kane became England's record scorer in March 2023 and the Bayern Munich striker now has 68 goals for his country.

Inspired by the longevity of Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo, who recently scored his 901st career goal, and NFL legend Tom Brady, Kane shows no signs of easing up in his record-setting career. It was a perfect night for the former Tottenham star, who led England onto the pitch alongside his two of children before kick-off and was presented with a commemorative gold cap by fellow Three Lions



**LONDON:** Finland's defender #04 Robert Ivanov (R) defends a cross from England's striker #09 Harry Kane during their UEFA Nations League, League B - Group 2, first leg football match between England and Finland. — AFP

centurions Frank Lampard and Ashley Cole.

"His finishing is very good, even in training. It's not a surprise when he scores goals as his habits are so good," England interim boss Lee Carsley said. "The way he trains and conducts himself, he is a great example for the rest of the players."

While Kane took the spotlight, it was also another encouraging game for Carsley, who oversaw a 2-0 victory against Ireland in his first game in charge on Saturday. Carsley is the first England

manager to win his first two competitive games since Fabio Capello in 2008.

The 50-year-old, who replaced Southgate following his resignation after the Euro 2024 final loss to Spain, has deployed an attacking game-plan that stands in stark contrast to his predecessor's conservative tactics.

### Midas touch

Whether that will be enough to earn him the job

on a permanent basis remains to be seen, but his impressive start has given the Football Association food for thought before England return to action against Greece in October.

"I'm totally relaxed about the situation. I have got to do a good job," Carsley said. "We have shown ourselves that we can do it. We can put ideas in place and the players have responded really well." Showing faith in the players he worked with as England Under-21 coach, Carsley gave a first Three Lions start to Lille midfielder Angel Gomes, who gave a made solid impact, while Chelsea winger Noni Madueke set up Kane's second goal after coming off the bench for his debut.

Carsley's previous visit to Wembley was to watch Bruce Springsteen earlier this year and, while England might not have put on a show to match the other 'Boss', they had a headline act of their own in Kane. Wearing gold boots, Kane turned the Nations League Group B2 tie in rain-lashed north London into the latest demonstration of his midas touch.

After being denied by a tight offside call in the first half and several fine saves from Finland keeper Lukas Hradecky, Kane got the goal he craved in the 58th minute. Taking Trent Alexander-Arnold's pass 20 yards from goal, Kane deftly shifted the ball into space before unleashing a blistering strike that cannoned into the net off the underside of the crossbar.

Kane's 26th goal in 35 Wembley appearances for England was swiftly followed by his 27th in the 76th minute. Running to Alexander-Arnold's pinpoint pass, Madueke teed up Kane with a low cross that the striker slotted home in typically predatory fashion from 12 yards. Capping a night to remember, Kane exited to a standing ovation when he was substituted moments later. — AFP