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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar's industrial producers' price index increases in July: NPC

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Saudi to host Global AI Summit in Sept

Saudi Arabia will host the third Global AI Summit, organised by the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) in Riyadh from Sept 10-12, with the participation of more than 300 experts, specialists and decision-makers from 100 countries around the world. The summit will review global experiences in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including those that focus on the importance of business leaders understanding rapidly evolving AI technologies, and the impact of this on how to increase production driven by strategic decision-making. (QNA)

Air strikes hit Russia, Ukraine border cities

Aerial strikes on Russian and Ukrainian border cities killed at least a dozen people yesterday, bombardments that came as Kyiv dismissed its air force commander in a major military shake-up. Both sides also claimed to have advanced on the battlefield — Moscow in eastern Ukraine and Kyiv in its shock offensive into Russia's western Kursk region — with the fighting showing no sign of subsiding, two and a half years into Russia's invasion. A Russian aerial strike on the northeastern city of Kharkiv yesterday afternoon killed seven people, including a 14-year-old girl, Ukraine's interior minister said. (AFP) Page 7

Nationwide power outage in Venezuela

Power began to return to some parts of Venezuela yesterday afternoon after capital Caracas and much of the rest of the country were earlier plunged into a blackout that the government blamed on sabotage by the opposition, without providing evidence. President Nicolas Maduro, who is locked in a dispute with the opposition over the outcome of a July 28 presidential election, often blames what he says are "attacks" on the power grid on his political rivals, accusations the opposition has always denied. All 24 of the country's states reported a total or partial loss of electricity supply, Freddy Nanez, the minister of communication and information, said on state television early yesterday morning. (Reuters)



Palestinians walk near rubble, after Israeli forces withdrew from the area, following a ground operation in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Death toll from Israeli raid in W Bank hits 20

AFP
Jenin

The death toll from a three-day Israeli raid on the occupied West Bank rose to 20 yesterday, Israel and the Palestinian health ministry said, while violence raged on in the Gaza Strip.

It came as US-based aid group Anera said an Israeli strike killed four Palestinians accompanying its convoy on Thursday.

The UN's World Food Programme on Wednesday said it had suspended aid operations after one of its vehicles was hit by an Israeli strike.

In the US, Vice-President Kamala Harris pledged she would not change Washington's policy of supplying weapons to Israel if elected to the top job in November. But she stressed it was time to "end this war" in Gaza.

Israeli troops pulled back from other West Bank towns late Thursday but fighting raged on around Jenin.

Yesterday evening an AFP photographer reported that gunfire and explosions were ongoing in Jenin.

In Gaza, Israeli artillery pound-

ed western areas of Gaza City early yesterday, an AFP journalist said, while a medical source at the southern Nasser Hospital said an Israeli strike killed three people near the southern city of Khan Younis.

The World Health Organisation said Israel had agreed to at least three days of "humanitarian pauses" in parts of Gaza, starting Sunday, to facilitate a vaccination drive after the territory recorded its first case of polio in a quarter of a century.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the measures were "not a ceasefire".

The Israeli assault on the West Bank has caused significant destruction, especially in Tulkarem, whose governor Mustafa Taqatqa described the raids as "unprecedented" and a "dangerous signal".

The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said at least 45 people had been detained in the West Bank since Wednesday.

Britain yesterday said it was "deeply" concerned by the raids, urging Israel to "exercise restraint" and adhere to international law.

France said the Israeli operations "worsen a climate of unprecedented instability and vio-

lence", while Spain denounced "an outbreak of violence which is clearly unacceptable".

Israeli shelling in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza killed two people yesterday, the civil defence agency in the Hamas-ruled territory said.

The acting head of the UN humanitarian office (OCHA), Joyce Msuya, said "more than 88% of Gaza's territory has come under an (Israeli) order to evacuate at some point", adding civilians were being forced into just 11% of the Gaza Strip.

"It forces us to ask: what has become of our basic sense of humanity?" OCHA yesterday said that "in August, the number of humanitarian missions and movements within Gaza that have been denied access by Israeli authorities has almost doubled, compared with July".

Israel's military campaign has killed at least 40,602 people in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. The UN rights office says most of the dead are women and children.

The war has devastated Gaza, repeatedly displaced most of its 2.4mn people and triggered a humanitarian crisis.

Amir, German chancellor discuss bilateral ties, regional developments



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed yesterday in a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz bilateral relations, and ways to further develop and promote them. The call also dealt with the key regional and international developments of mutual interest. (QNA)

Qatar, a global test bed for innovation: QRDI official

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Qatar Research Development and Innovation (QRDI) Council is acting as a facilitator to make the country a test bed for international organisations to set up their initiatives, an official told *Gulf Times*.

"There are many initiatives that we are promoting to invite start-ups and companies from abroad to come and set up in Qatar to see Qatar as a test bed for their innovative solutions and to develop their technology in Qatar," Malik Habayeb, international partnerships programme expert at QRDI, explained.

Speaking on the sidelines of an event in collaboration with Thai embassy in Doha, the official said that the main goal at QRDI is to help these institutions find the right partner in Qatar.

"QRDI is a funding agency and our mandate is certainly to build the partnerships and foster these partnerships. This is our goal for our partners from any country around the world. This is why Qatar is investing heavily in the technology space."

Habayeb said that there are unique opportunities where corporates and startups can come to Qatar, check out the ecosystem and get acquainted with the cutting-edge infrastructure that the country offers.

The unique part of QRDI research portfolio is that it allows



QRDI official Malik Habayeb speaking to *Gulf Times*. PICTURE: Thajudheen

20% of the grants to be spent outside the country.

"However, the lead investigator in a research project has to be based in Qatar and they can collaborate with the research entities abroad. What we are trying to explain to our partners in Thailand as well as elsewhere in the world is that they are very much eligible to apply to engage with a local lead principal investigator in Qatar, if they have a project that is of mutual interest," continued Habayeb.

"The lead investigator can be any university or research institutes with a registered research office in Qatar. As long as there is a registered research office, the institute has all of the required approvals. This includes Qatar University, University of Doha for Science and Technology HBK or any such universities in Qatar and they can collaborate with an international partner. This can also be any research institutes operating in Qatar," he pointed out. To Page 2

Multiple measures in place to ensure students' safety

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

In time for the reopening of schools across Qatar tomorrow, the General Directorate of Traffic, the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) and Mowasalat (Karwa) have put in place multiple measures to ensure the safe and smooth transport of students.

These include the integrated traffic plan by the General Directorate of Traffic, safety measures on the roads by Ashghal and deploying eco-friendly buses by Karwa to transport the students. The government and private schools across the country will welcome a total of 378,134 students.



Ashghal has completed school zone safety measures around 611 schools across Qatar as part of its School Zone Safety Programme.

As part of its continuous efforts to reduce traffic accidents and achieve road safety, the directorate

has chalked out a comprehensive plan to facilitate the movement of vehicles and reduce congestion on

main roads around schools. Patrols and traffic police will be increased with a focus on intersections and around schools that are prone to congestion.

Lt Abdulmohsin al-Asmar al-Ruwaili, traffic media officer at the General Directorate of Traffic, earlier told Qatar News Agency that the department had prepared an integrated plan to control traffic flow during the school year.

Ashghal has completed school zone safety measures around 611 schools across Qatar as part of its School Zone Safety Programme. These include the construction and enhancement of roads while adhering to stringent safety protocols.

Directional signs, reflective road studs as well as interlocks, kerbs

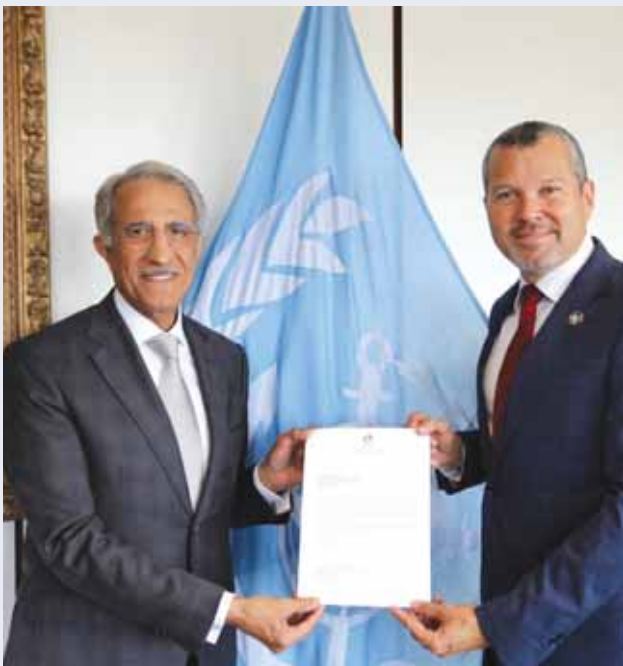
and pedestrian railing are in place near and around schools in addition to road and crosswalk markings, aiming to enhance pedestrian visibility in school zones and adjacent areas and enforcement of a 30kph speed limit.

The General Directorate of Traffic and Ashghal carried out several awareness initiatives to target students, parents, school bus drivers and staff ahead of the beginning of the new academic year.

Mowasalat (Karwa) has deployed 3,000 eco-friendly school buses to transport students. Strategy Management Office director Mohamed Ahmed M K Abukhadja told Qatar TV that these buses are equipped with the latest safety and security technology.



IMO secretary-general receives credentials of Qatar's permanent representative



Secretary-General of International Maritime Organisation (IMO), Arsenio Antonio Dominguez, received the credentials of HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed bin Saud al-Thani as the State of Qatar's Permanent Representative to the IMO. During the meeting, they discussed relations between Qatar and the IMO and ways to support and enhance them and issues of common interest. **(QNA)**

GAC foils marijuana smuggling attempt



The General Authority of Customs (GAC) has foiled an attempt to smuggle 17kg of the illicit drug marijuana into Qatar, a post on X said. The seizure happened when the unit concerned of the Ministry of Interior suspected a number of packages and referred them to customs officers at Hamad Port and the southern ports for inspection. The GAC has posted a video of the operation on X. The drugs were concealed in packages containing some other items and handicrafts. After inspection using an X-ray device, the drugs were found hidden inside the cavities of wooden pallets.

Transport minister attends virtual meet on Al-Faw Port development

HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif Ahmed al-Sulaiti has participated, via videoconferencing, in the first quartet Ministerial Council meeting on the Development Road project and Al-Faw Port development. The meeting was attended by UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure Suhail Mohamed al-Mazrouei, Iraqi Minister of Transport Razzaq Muhaiabas al-Saadawi, and Turkish Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu. The ministers discussed the latest on that strategic project and the updates regarding roads and railroads construction works. **(QNA)**



Qatar's efforts to achieve peace in Gaza highlighted at OIC meet

Qatar took part in the 50th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) which kicked off on Thursday in Yaounde, Cameroon. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi chaired the State of Qatar's delegation to the two-day session.

In its statement, Qatar said the world is going through serious and escalating challenges that affect all countries. In light of these dangerous developments, the role of the OIC emerges as an effective force to confront multiple challenges and crises, by unifying visions, mobilising joint action and doubling efforts to confront common challenges, including extremism, terrorism, fanaticism, and policies of discrimination and hatred.

The statement affirmed that the Palestinian cause remains a top priority for the OIC member states, stressing the increasing importance of the Palestinian issue in light of the ongoing genocide, war crimes and massacres committed by the brutal Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

The statement also reiterated condemnation of the attacks carried out by the occupation authorities against the Palestinian

people in the West Bank and the violation of Islamic sanctities by storming the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque, emphasising that these flagrant violations are the result of continued impunity and deterrence, and the international community's failure to ensure the rights of the Palestinian people and enforce the provisions of international law and UN resolutions.

The repeated escalation in the Palestinian issue should be a reminder to the international community that there is no escape from serious and persistent efforts towards a permanent, just and comprehensive settlement of this issue in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, the statement stressed.

The statement renewed Qatar's solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in their legitimate pursuit of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Qatar has made preventive diplomacy, avoiding the root causes of conflicts, and making every effort to contribute to achieving and sustaining peace a priority in its foreign policy, the statement noted.

Qatar is devoting its diplomatic efforts to supporting the settlement of disputes by peaceful means and serving international peace and security, guided by the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. Qatar is now recognized as a reliable partner in peacemaking through mediation, dialogue and diplomacy, the statement added.

The statement pointed to the important agreements reached through the current Qatari mediation and over the past years are in the interest of millions in various parts of the world, including many member states of the OIC.

Meanwhile, the statement drew attention to the resurgence of hate speech and its manifestations, as well as other forms of discrimination and intolerance against foreigners recently, affirming support for the efforts of the OIC at various levels to condemn and confront this abhorrent phenomenon and promote positive tolerance and coexistence.

Qatar is one of the countries that actively works to promote a culture of peace and values of tolerance and coexistence among all, the statement stressed. The statement renewed Qatar's commitment to fulfilling its pledges to strengthen the bonds of unity and solidarity among the OIC member states and their peoples. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir sends cables of condolences to Saudi King Salman

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Noura bint Abdullah al-Abdulrahman al-Saud. **(QNA)**

Amir sends cables of condolences to king of Thailand

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn, on the victims of floods and landslides that hit several areas in the country, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of condolences to Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra. **(QNA)**

Al-Muraikhi meets acting FM of Afghanistan

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with Acting Foreign Minister in the Caretaker Government of Afghanistan Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, on the sidelines of the 50th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) held in Yaounde. The meeting dealt with discussing the latest developments in Afghanistan. **(QNA)**

Arab Mols hail setting up of UN centre for combating cybercrime in Doha

The first conference of officials in charge of combating information technology crimes within Arab interior ministries hailed the establishment of the UN regional centre for combating cybercrime in Doha.

Under the chairmanship of Qatar, the two-day event which concluded at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers Council in Tunis, urged the relevant agencies in member states to communicate with it to determine needs and possible training opportunities.

Chaired by Director of the Economic and Cyber Crimes Combating Depart-

ment at the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Brigadier Ali Hassan al-Kubaisi, the event reviewed the experiences of countries and the challenges they face in the field of information technology crimes, and discussed a draft Arab plan to confront crimes committed using artificial intelligence.

It also requested the General Secretariat of the council to begin preparing an Arab action plan to prevent information technology crimes in the Arab region in co-operation with the centre.

The participants also called on the General Secretariat, in co-operation

with the centre, to consider the possibility of holding a meeting between officials responsible for combating information technology crimes in member states, and representatives of social media networks and major companies operating in the Internet field to study the possibility of co-operation to confront information technology crimes.

They stressed the importance of implementing field training for Arab countries to measure the readiness of the relevant authorities to deal with information technology crimes, and organising a workshop for officials in this field. **(QNA)**

Qatar, a global test bed for innovation: QRDI official

From Page 1

Habayeb noted that the role of QRDI is to connect the academic community in Qatar with the academic and research community in other countries. As for the current collaboration with the Thai embassy in Qatar he said that there are plans on further engagements with the embassy with their support to host further delegations and also to potentially build research partnerships with Thai universities.

The embassy had presented three innovative ideas to transform waste materials to value added products at a special event attended by QRDI officials and academics from various institutes in Qatar.

"Qatar has its own national priorities, ranging from sustainability, water, agriculture, food security and climate change. Qatar National Research Fund, the research arm of QRDI, has a programme around the national priorities and there are calls that are regularly published to address specific challenges. These are all different specific areas that have been co-designed with the local ministries in Qatar to address specific problems," added Habayeb.

QU Health students excel in international internship at hospital in Italy

A group of 20 students from Qatar University's (QU) College of Medicine and College of Health Sciences completed an international internship at Mater Olbia Hospital in Sardinia, Italy. The month-long programme, offered 10 medical, five physical therapy, and five biomedical science students a unique opportunity to gain hands-on clinical experience.

This collaboration between QU Health and Mater Olbia Hospital underscores the commitment of both institutions to fostering global healthcare education and providing students with world-class training, a QU statement said. Prof Asmaa al-Thani, vice-president for Health and Medical Sciences at QU, said: "This international experience fosters a global perspective on our academic practices. The students gained valuable skills that will enhance their healthcare careers and improve their ability to handle diverse diagnostic, treatment, and examination protocols."

Prof Giovanni Delogu, Professor of Microbiology at the Catholic University in Italy and Scientific Director at Mater Olbia Hospital, said the students actively participated in the daily clinical activities in the many fields of medicine. "The students attended regularly the series of 18 lectures and showed an excellent knowledge of the mechanisms of diseases, the diag-



nostic approach to be chosen and therapies to be adopted. I admired their critical thinking and ability to interact and comments during the lectures.

"Moreover, the students were very polite and respectful. We hope we can build a stronger collaboration with Qatar University thanks to this programme," he said.

Prof Maurizio Porcu, head of the Cardiology and Internal Medicine Unit for medicine students, noted: "The participants strongly confirm the previous evidence of a diffused high level of knowledge and excellent baseline preparation achieved during their course of study. They already orient themselves adequately in clinical strategies, are able to plan diagnosis and treatments and show a diffused proactive behaviour, generally not so easy

to detect among medical students."

Prof Dario Luchetti, head of the Physical Medical and Rehabilitation Unit for physical therapy students, commented: "All the students showed a solid understanding of the physical therapy practices, and a marked ability to apply their knowledge in the clinical settings. They were also able to brilliantly overcome the language barriers that they encountered with patients that could speak only Italian!"

Nada Asadollah al-Emadi, section head of Global Education and Student Exchange at the Student Activities Department, said: "Facilitating such trips is crucial for our students as it enriches their practical skills and experiences, giving them an early entry into the real world of work."

In her role as supervisor for the

Mater Olbia internship programme, Dr Zain Zaki Zakaria, section head of Clinical Appointment who supervised the students during the trip, said: "Throughout their stay, we received consistently positive feedback from the hospital team regarding the students' conduct. They impressed everyone with their maturity, responsibility, and professionalism. This programme provided them with invaluable clinical exposure while also fostering a strong reputation for QU Health students on the international stage."

Salwa al-Maraghi, College of Medicine student, said travelling for a hospital internship in a different country was an incredibly enriching experience that broadened her professional and personal horizons.



"I learned advanced medical techniques and witnessed a diverse range of medical conditions, many of which I had only read about in textbooks. This journey not only bolstered my medical knowledge but also cultivated a profound appreciation for cultural diversity and adaptability in healthcare settings. It was a transformative experience that will undoubtedly shape my future career in medicine."

Abdulla al-Kaabi said: "As a medical student interested in orthopaedics, my summer internship at Mater Olbia Hospital was incredibly beneficial. I had the opportunity to work with experienced doctors in the operating room, clinic, and ward, where I encountered various cases and performed different procedures, significantly enhancing my clinical skills."

Latifa al-Neiami, also a College of Medicine student, said: "It was an entirely different experience that allowed me to acquire new surgical skills." Mai AlFehaidi, a Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science student, said the internship provided her hands-on experience with advanced techniques such as manual therapy and neurological rehabilitation, which enhanced my practical skills. "It also improved my cultural competence, as I learned to adapt to and respect different healthcare approaches, enriching my ability to work with a diverse patient population."

Areej al-Rauili, a Biomedical Sciences student said the internship allowed her to immerse in a real-world setting, applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations in a hospital environment."

Egypt eyes shift from commodity subsidies to cash payments: PM

Reuters
Cairo

Egypt could begin transitioning from subsidising essential commodities to providing direct cash assistance to its poorest citizens as early as the next fiscal year (July to June), Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said on Thursday.

Currently, Egypt subsidises essential commodities for more than half of its population. Over 60mn people have access to discounted prices on staples like pasta, vegetable oil and sugar through state-run outlets, while at least 10mn more benefit from subsidised bread.

“There is widespread consensus that cash subsidies are the way forward,” Madbouly told a press conference, noting that the Ministry of Supply, which oversees Egypt’s

subsidy programme, is exploring various scenarios for this significant policy shift. Madbouly expressed optimism that the initial phase of the transition could start in the upcoming fiscal year, provided that consensus was reached on the matter at a year-old national political dialogue that is discussing a variety of reforms.

However, he emphasised that the transition would unfold gradually, in several stages. The National Dialogue, initiated by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in April 2022 amid one of Egypt’s most severe economic crises, aims to generate political, economic, and social reform recommendations for the president’s consideration.

The government also subsidises fuel but has outlined plans to reduce these subsidies, aiming to restore fuel prices to their full cost by December 2025. Despite the dou-

ble-digit inflation reading, diminishing local currency value, and the growing number of Egyptians living below the national poverty line - now almost one-third of the population - the government has been working to improve the targeting of food subsidies.

According to a recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, which followed the disbursement of a new tranche of Egypt’s \$8bn loan agreement, this effort includes removing ineligible individuals and maintaining a zero-growth policy in the total number of subsidy beneficiaries.

On Aug 19, newly appointed Supply Minister Sherif Farouk reiterated that no final decision has been made about the shift from in-kind subsidies to cash assistance. The government, he said, is still awaiting feedback from the National Dialogue.

EC president in Abu Dhabi



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan (centre) and UAE Minister of State for International Co-operation Reem bint Ibrahim al-Hashimi receiving European Council (EC) President Charles Michel at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Libya central bank showdown risks spiralling into wider crisis

- Further brinkmanship will hit key economic functions
- Rival Libya factions show no sign of backing down
- Oil blockade hits state revenues

By Angus McDowall
Reuters

A struggle to control the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) has already sparked a blockade of oil production and it threatens the worst crisis in years for the major energy exporter, long torn between rival eastern and western factions.

The standoff was triggered when western factions moved this month to oust veteran governor Sadiq al-Kabir and replace him with a rival board, leading eastern factions to shut down all oil production.

So tangled is the situation that while Kabir retains control of the central bank’s website, a rival board appointed by the presidency council is issuing statements on the bank’s verified Facebook page.

Kabir, who travelled abroad as the crisis unfolded, was quoted in the Financial Times on Friday saying “militias are threatening and terrifying bank staff and are

sometimes abducting their children and relatives”.

The central bank has been paralysed by the brinkmanship, leaving it unable to conduct transactions for more than a week, threatening basic economic functions, and neither side looks able to back down, making violence more likely by the day. Any move to resolve things peacefully will be complicated by a landscape fractured into rival governing institutions with tenuous claims to legitimacy, operating with few agreed rules and backed by a shifting constellation of armed factions.

Worse still, the crisis comes at a moment when international diplomacy to resolve Libya’s underlying political standoff has stalled, with the post of UN envoy vacant and no sign yet of foreign powers managing to rein in the rival factions.

“The equilibrium of the last two years has gone. Actors are now trying to build new leverage. So the crisis is set to get much worse,” said Jalel Harchaoui of the Royal United Services Institute.

Power struggle

Kabir has been Libya’s central banker since the 2011 Nato-backed uprising that plunged the country into chaos, becoming a major player among the warlords and politicians endlessly jostling for power. As the state crumbled between rival factions, the CBL and National Oil Corporation (NOC), the state energy producer, were held off limits, ensuring some governmental



Governor of Central Bank of Libya Sadiq al-Kabir gestures during an interview with Reuters in Tripoli.

functions continued. Libyan law, buttressed by international agreements, ruled that oil could be sold only by NOC, with revenue channelled into the CBL where it was used to fund state salaries and government bodies across the country.

This principle began to erode in 2022 when Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah installed a new NOC head in an apparent accommodation with eastern factions, leading to looser controls over the oil sector.

However, Dbeibah and Kabir fell out over spending and other issues, and the CBL governor was seen as moving closer to Khalifa Haftar, the military commander who controls eastern Libya.

By moving to replace Kabir, Presidency Council head Moham-

ed al-Menfi, backed by Dbeibah, has put control over Libya’s vast financial resources directly into play and neither side can easily back down.

“My overall view is that this is a political issue rather than a bureaucratic one. But it is extremely serious. Without consensus, the country’s strongest remaining institution could effectively be hollowed out,” said Tim Eaton of Chatham House.

The announced dismissal of Kabir also appeared to run counter to the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement, the basis for the international community’s dealings with Libyan factions for nearly a decade.

Gaining international acceptance for a bank governor is crucial. Libyan oil revenue accruing

to NOC is paid in dollars into its account at the Libyan Foreign Bank in New York before moving to the Tripoli government’s account with the CBL.

So far, the new board announced by Menfi appears unable to control CBL functions. At a news conference on Wednesday it appealed to Kabir to surrender codes that would allow it to make transfers. It has urged Libyan banks to pay state salaries from their own reserves, promising to repay them when it gains full control over transactions. Kabir responded with a statement on the CBL website telling banks to ignore instructions from people “impersonating” board members.

If the struggle for control is prolonged, all state salaries, transfers between banks and letters of credit needed for imports will all become impossible, freezing up the economy and Libya’s international trade.

At two banks in eastern Libya, employees said clearing operations to banks in the west had stopped, along with processing of foreign remittances. State salary payments had stopped.

Meanwhile, the eastern side’s oil blockade will gradually starve the CBL of new funds, as well as reducing condensate available for power plants, meaning long electricity blackouts may soon return. This all adds up to a miserable outlook for Libyans and raises the risk that armed factions could resort once again to fighting, some four years after a ceasefire ended the last major bout of warfare.

Sudan’s rains spread wartime suffering across the country

Since floods swept away their home in eastern Sudan, Ahmed Hadaab and his family have survived by drinking water mixed in with milk from his last surviving goat. “We don’t have any food,” he said after days of walking, trying to find something to eat, somewhere else to stay. “The sorghum and flour was taken by the torrent, and two of my goats and my donkey.” Floodwaters from heavy rains that started surging in earlier this month have brought devastation across a country already shattered by 500 days of fierce fighting between the army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Now, the natural disaster has spread destruction further than the conflict. Near the town of Tokar, in the country’s eastern region which has so far escaped the violence, a Reuters reporter saw people pulling each other out of the water onto the remnants of a bridge with ropes. Elsewhere in the eastern Red Sea State, the Arbaat Dam collapsed on Sunday, threatening the freshwater supply for Port Sudan, the country’s de facto capital, up to now a relative refuge for the government and aid agencies and hundreds of thousands of displaced. At least 64 people from the area are missing. Others are stranded on higher ground with no food and little hope of rescue. Many hundreds of households are also displaced in Sudan’s Northern State, another region largely untouched by the fighting, according to the United Nations. In Darfur, where millions are threatened with extreme hunger, the rain has damaged displacement camps and delayed the arrival of crucial aid according to the World Food Programme.—

Reuters

Salvage of stricken oil tanker in Red Sea expected in coming days: sources

- Salvage operation of MV Sounion to start in coming days
- Efforts made to speed up process due to environmental concerns
- EU ASPIDES ships to protect and escort the vessel

Reuters
Athens

A salvage operation to recover a Greek registered oil tanker stranded in the Red Sea after an attack by Houthis is expected to start in the coming days, two sources with knowledge of the matter said on Friday.

What was decided yesterday is an initial gameplan, of the operation starting in 48 hours,” one of the sources said. A second source said the operation was likely to be complex, since Houthis had rigged the vessel with explosives.

At stake is the safe removal of a tanker laden with about 1mn barrels of crude that if spilled could cause an environmental catastrophe in an area that is particularly



A Houthi militia man walks on the deck of the Sounion oil tanker on the Red Sea, in this screen grab picture.

dangerous to access. Efforts are being made to speed up the process, sources said. Yemen’s Houthi militants carried out multiple assaults, including planting bombs on the already disabled 900ft (274.2m) Sounion. On Wednesday, the fighters said they would allow salvage crews to tow the ship - which has been on fire since Aug 23 - to safety.

The sources said the priority of the operation - whether to tow the vessel to a port or arrange a transfer of its cargo - depended on an inspection of the vessel. “It is not an easy task, transferring the oil cargo to another ship, when there are explosives on it,” said one of the sources. “In any case, (EU monitoring mission) ASPIDES ships will protect and escort the vessel to a safe port.”

Greece has also been in touch with Saudi Arabia, a key player in

the region, to ask for assistance.

“Delta Tankers is doing everything it can to move the vessel (and cargo). For security reasons, we are not in a position to comment further,” a spokesperson for the Athens-based tanker operator said. There had been conflicting accounts earlier in the week over whether the Sounion had started leaking its cargo. The EU’s ASPIDES team insisted it had not, while the US later rowed back on initial comments to say some of the spillage was not from the cargo, but from the vessel itself and where it had been hit.

If a spill occurs, it has the potential to be among the largest from a ship in recorded history.

“Houthis have agreed to allow its towing because at the end of the day any environmental disaster would affect their region,” said a shipping industry source.

Houthis rally for Gaza



Protesters, mainly Houthi supporters, rally to show solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in Sanaa, Yemen, yesterday.



A protester holds a mobile phone with a Palestinian flag.





Mpox vaccines expected to arrive in DR Congo within days: WHO

AFP
Geneva

A first delivery of mpox vaccines is expected to arrive in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the coming days, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

The WHO declared an international emergency over mpox on August 14, concerned by the surge in cases of the new Clade 1b strain in the DR Congo that spread to nearby countries.

After returning from the DRC yesterday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference: “We hope to

have the first delivery in the next few days, and then it will build up.” More than 18,000 suspected cases of mpox have been reported in the DRC so far this year, with 629 deaths, said Tedros.

The figure included more than 5,000 cases and 31 deaths in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu, where Clade 1b has been spreading.

“The number of reported cases of Clade 1b has been rising rapidly for several weeks. Fortunately, relatively few deaths have been reported in recent weeks,” said Tedros.

In addition, 258 cases of Clade 1b have been confirmed in neigh-

bouring Burundi; four in Rwanda, four in Uganda, two in Kenya and one each in Sweden and Thailand, he added.

In the DRC, Tedros met with President Felix Tshisekedi to discuss the outbreaks, the importance of clear communication on the virus and strong engagement with local communities.

“We believe we can stop these outbreaks in the next six months,” the UN health agency’s director-general said.

WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) is designed to expedite the availability of unlicensed medical products, such as vaccines, for use in a public health emergency.

The two main procurers of vaccines for low-income countries – the Gavi vaccine alliance and the UN children’s agency Unicef – require EUL status to buy vaccines for use in countries that have not issued their own national regulatory approval.

Two mpox vaccines – MVA-BN, produced by Danish drugmaker Bavarian Nordic, and Japan’s LC16 – have been put forward for EUL status.

Tedros said the information the WHO had hitherto on the two vaccines was partial, and the UN health agency received the additional information it needed on August 23.

The process for granting EUL

could take another two weeks, but in the meantime, Tedros has given Gavi and Unicef the authority to begin procuring vaccines pending approval.

“We don’t need to wait until two weeks before we proceed with procurements,” he explained.

However, “the safety and efficacy of vaccines are our highest priority. We will not take shortcuts,” he added.

Tim Nguyen from the WHO health emergency programme said the European Union had procured 175,000 doses of MVA-BN, while Bavarian Nordic was donating 40,000 doses.

All in all, there are “about 230,000 doses that we understand

are imminently available to be dispatched to affected regions”, he said.

There were further pledges of donations, but Nguyen said they needed to materialise into donations.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s epidemic and pandemic preparedness and prevention director, said vaccines were only one of several available tools to crack down on the virus.

“Right now, even when vaccines aren’t available – and it’s going to take some time for the vaccines to reach those at risk – the right messages can be reaching the right at-risk populations,” she said.

Kenya records first mpox case in capital

AFP
Nairobi

Kenya has confirmed its first case of mpox in the capital Nairobi in a traveller now in quarantine, the health ministry said yesterday, taking the tally of infections in the country to three.

The patient, a 30-year-old woman, arrived in Kenya from neighbouring Uganda a week ago, director general for health Patrick Amoth said in a statement.

She has been isolated at a hospital in Nairobi and is in a stable condition, he said.

The case is the first outbreak of the disease in Nairobi, the country’s most populous city, with 4.4mn inhabitants according to the latest census in 2019.

Two other patients have since recovered and been discharged from hospitals near the southwest and eastern borders.

“Seventeen contacts remain under close observation and this positive outcome demonstrates our effective response and management of the disease,” the health ministry said. Seven samples were being screened for the virus transmitted to humans by in-

fecting animals that can also be passed from human to human through close physical contact.

It causes fever, muscle pains and skin lesions and in an increasing number of cases, death.

The disease’s resurgence and the detection in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) of a new strain, dubbed Clade 1b, prompted the World Health Organisation to declare its highest international alert level on August 14.

The African Union’s health watchdog, Africa CDC, also declared a public health emergency over the growing mpox outbreak on the continent.

Cases are surging in the region, with outbreaks reported in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, but have also been detected in Asia and Europe.

At least 22,863 suspected cases and 622 deaths had been reported in Africa as of August 27, the Africa CDC said on Wednesday.

According to the WHO, Africa had 5,281 confirmed cases of mpox from the beginning of 2024 up till August 25.

The DRC, where the virus was first discovered in humans in 1970, has borne the brunt of the epidemic with 90% of 2024’s reported mpox cases, according to the WHO.

Nine DR Congo coup accused plead not guilty

AFP
Kinshasa

Nine defendants on trial in the Democratic Republic of Congo over what the army says was a coup attempt yesterday pleaded not guilty.

Fifty-one people, including three US citizens, are on trial over the incident, which began in the early hours of May 19 when armed men attacked the home of the DRC’s Economy Minister Vital Kamerhe.

The group then went to a building housing President Felix Tshisekedi’s offices, brandishing flags of Zaire, the country’s name under ex-dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who was overthrown in 1997.

Shots were heard near the build-

ing, several sources said at the time.

An army spokesman later announced on national TV that defence and security forces had stopped “an attempted coup d’etat”.

The alleged plot was led by Christian Malanga, a Congolese man who was a “naturalised American” and who was killed by security forces, army spokesman General Sylvain Ekenge has said.

Three days ago, military prosecutor Lieutenant Colonel Innocent Radjabu urged judges to sentence to death all but one of the 51 defendants.

“We plead not guilty,” Richard Bondo, a lawyer for US citizen Benjamin Zalman-Polun, told the court yesterday, calling for the detainees to be released.

The three Americans on trial

at the Kinshasa military court include Malanga’s son Marcel Malanga.

Tyler Thompson, another of the American defendants, told the court last month that he had been “forced” into participating, echoing the two other US citizens facing the same charge.

Zalman-Polun said he was “kidnapped” and “forced” into taking part.

The defendants also include a Belgian, a Briton and a Canadian who are all naturalised Congolese.

The trial began on June 7 in Ndolo military prison, where all the defendants are being held.

The charges include “attack, terrorism, illegal possession of weapons and munitions of war, attempted assassination, criminal association, murder (and) financing of terrorism”.

Nearly 6,200 murders in S Africa over three months

AFP
Johannesburg

Nearly 6,200 people were murdered in South Africa between April and June, police figures showed yesterday, as tackling crime poses a key issue for the new coalition government.

Police Minister Senzo Mchunu said that 6,198 people were murdered during the three months, a 0.5-percent decrease over the same period a year earlier.

“These numbers tell a sobering story, reflecting the severity of the challenges we face,” he told a Cape Town press conference.

South Africa has one of the highest peacetime per capita homicide rates in the world.

Rapes, in a country notorious for sex attacks against women and children, increased by 0.6%, compared to the same three-month period last year.

The country recorded a total



of 9,309 rapes between April and June.

Police also said there were 44,735 drug-related crimes detected as a result of police action during the period.

“We have carried out significant operations targeting drug syndicates, leading to the seizure of substantial quantities of illegal narcotics,” the minister said.

Last month, three Mexicans and two South Africans were

arrested when elite police units raided a multi-million-dollar crystal meth lab hidden in a remote farm north of Johannesburg.

In a separate incident, a Russian man was arrested along with a South African after police seized 14 bags filled with bricks of cocaine worth 252mn rand (almost \$14mn).

Crime is a key issue facing President Cyril Ramaphosa’s new coalition government after his African National Congress was forced into an uneasy coalition with the centrist Democratic Alliance and other smaller parties following May elections.

“These numbers represent more than just figures on a page; they reflect the lived realities of our citizens – their fears, their losses and their hopes for a safer tomorrow,” Mchunu said.

“We will confront these challenges head-on and work tirelessly to ensure that South Africa is a place where all can feel safe and secure once again,” he vowed.

Lion breeders face uncertain future

Reuters
Johannesburg

South Africa’s phase-out of breeding captive big game and ban on the use of lions for commercial gain have left some big-cat breeders worried about their business prospects.

A ministerial task team appointed by former minister of environment, Barbara Creecy, recommended in December 2022 closure of the breeding sector, but did not provide financial incentives for lion owners once the ban took effect.

The government implemented the recommendations in April, with no deadline for breeding to cease.

No changes to the plans have been made since South Africa’s national election in May, which resulted in President Cyril Ramaphosa leading a unity government and the appointment of a new environment minister.

South Africa has over 8,000 lions living in captivity, the largest captive lion population in the world, surpassing the country’s wild lion population. Willie Le Roux, a game lodge owner and wildlife artificial reproduction researcher, said his lodge has been involved in artificial reproductive research with local and international universities since 2006, and in 2017 produced the first lion cubs through artificial insemination.

“(The government) can’t have it both ways... they can’t give us (permission) for the research, but then cut off our stream of income,” Le Roux said.

Le Roux’s lodge allows tourists to participate in guided educational walks with lions, which he said helps pay his employees and fund his research facility. Asini Sanadi, an animal handler who has worked at Le Roux’s lodge for 14 years and is the sole financial



Asini Sanadi, an animal handler who has worked at Le Roux’s lodge for 14 years, walks next to lions at a captive breeding facility for big cats, maintained for tourist entertainment in Brits, North West Province, in South Africa.

provider for his family, said ending big-cat breeding would hurt his livelihood.

The department’s report encouraged breeding facility owners to voluntarily leave the industry by euthanising or sterilising the animals, or handing them over to the government to be released into the wild or moved to sanctuaries.

“Conservation organisations could reallocate funds and resources currently directed towards the captive-breeding industry to support genuine conservation efforts,” said Fiona Miles, director of animal welfare organisation Four Paws in South Africa.

The communities surrounding wildlife reserves and national parks could see economic gains if tourism increases, Miles said.

Lagos turns to waterways for green transport solution

AFP
Lagos

Nigerian saleswoman Ivy Junaid says her daily half-an-hour commute from mainland Lagos to the city’s island business district has changed her life.

What was once often a three-hour nightmare drive to work with a pre-dawn start and gnarly traffic has become a quick sprint skimming across the waters of Lagos lagoon by boat.

“You can actually get out of bed when you need to. You have breakfast at home, strut in here, strut into the boat and 30 minutes across the water,” the telecoms employee said.

“It’s really a life-saving situation for most of us.” Flanked by lagoon waters and the Atlantic Ocean, Nigeria’s economic capital Lagos has long used its waterways

as an alternative to the megacity’s chaotic roads.

But soon more commuters like Junaid in the city of 20mn could be travelling by boat under plans to massively expand waterway transport and multiply passenger numbers.

With an around €410mn (\$455mn) investment from France’s AFD development agency and EU institutions, the programme – known as Omi Eko or Lagos Water in Yoruba language – also aims to tackle carbon emissions with a fleet of electric-powered ferries.

Whereas most Lagosians live on the mainland part of the city, a lot of offices and workplaces are on the islands area – Victory Island, Ikoyi, Lagos Island and Lekki – linked by a series of bridges.

That means road traffic to the islands in the morning and back to the mainland after work can be

heavy going. Even a small accident on a bridge or repair work can cause miles of tailback.

Bad roads and flooding during the rainy season coupled with the chaotic fleets of informal “Danfo” minibuses that pack the roads compound the difficulties.

The state government already has ambitious plans for more integrated public transport as Lagos barrels towards becoming the world’s most populated city by the end of the century.

Intracity trainlines and dedicated bus lanes fed by smaller minibus routes aim to reduce traffic.

But only after years of delays, the first Blue Line train finally started running last year from a section of the mainland. Another Red Line is scheduled to open soon.

With water on all sides, however, boat transport is an obvious solution – and one the project’s funders believe could be replicated in Cameroon and Ivory Coast.

“We have viewed the waterways as the potential jewel in the crown to ensure we can unlock the traffic we see on the roads,” General Manager of Lagos State Waterways Authority, Oluwadamilola Emmanuel, told AFP.

Transport and its costs are a major problem for Lagosians.

Nigeria faces its worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, with inflation at more than 30% and fuel costs more than triple the price of 18 months ago after government reforms.

That can mean a lot in a country where half the 200-million population lives in some form of poverty and where the minimum monthly wage is 70,000 naira or \$46.

Nigerians have adapted. Some drive less, use public transport or work more from home. For Lagos boat operators, it often means cutting back to a single one-way trip a day.

Transport expert Samuel

Odewumi at Lagos State University says the current Lagos administration will have to ensure the new development is sustainable.

“There are no cons, there are pros and pros for Lagos state with water transport,” he said. “But over the years it has been in fits and starts.” Other problems such as dredging, fuel prices, jetty and boat quality and safety will need to be tackled, he said.

For the French agency AFD, already working with Lagos on bus systems, inland waterways were a clear solution to the oversaturated Lagos road network and a way to link up points around the city.

Over the next three years, the project aims to develop 15 ferry routes with more than 75 electric vessels, as well as upgrade the jetty system and dredge routes.

To overcome the city’s feeble power grid, solar infrastructure and compressed natural gas gen-

erators will recharge the vessels at jetties.

“We already know that other countries are looking very closely at what we’re doing with this project,” David Margonsztern, chief of AFD’s transport projects, told AFP.

Waterways authority chief Emmanuel hopes the project will increase boat passengers from around two % of total commuters now to around 10%.

“We will be moving about 10mn people on a monthly basis,” he said.

Cost and fear of water are concerns for many.

For first time boat rider Adeyemi Jagbojagbo, a driver, the novelty of arriving at a ferry terminal provided relief from the traffic but he was still unsure he would do it again.

“This is my first time, I’m so scared, like the way the boat was doing,” he said. “So I just pray maybe I should come back.”

Honduras says it axed extradition treaty to avoid US plot

AFP/Reuters
Tegucigalpa

Honduran President Xiomara Castro said on Thursday that her surprise decision to end an extradition treaty with the United States was to prevent it from being used in a plot against her government and military leaders.

“A plan is being hatched against my government,” she said, a day after announcing the end of the pact that has put powerful drug traffickers in US jails.

Castro said she took the step in response to “interference” by US ambassador Laura Dogu, who criticised a meeting of senior Honduran officials with Venezuelan Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez.

Dogu told reporters that she was surprised to see Honduran Defence Minister Jose Manuel Zelaya and military chief General Roosevelt Hernandez sitting next to a “drug trafficker” in Venezuela.

“They attacked the head of the armed forces and our defence minister – an attack that we cannot allow,” Castro said in a speech while inaugurating an electric power project.

“I will not allow extradition to be used to intimidate or blackmail the Honduran armed forces. We’re defending our armed forces,” said the leftist leader.

Castro’s government is a staunch ally of Venezuela, which is under pressure from Washington and other countries following the disputed re-election of President Nicolas Maduro in July.

Honduran Foreign Minister Enrique Reina said the treaty was being scrapped to stop it from being used as a “political weapon” against the government.

“A coup attempt could be brewing here right now,” Reina said on a television programme.

Military intelligence detected after the US ambassador’s statements that a group of officers was “conspiring” to remove Hernandez, he said.

Castro’s husband Manuel Zelaya, president from 2006-2009, was overthrown in a military coup supported by business elites and the political right.

The extradition agreement is considered a key tool to dismantle the “narco-state” that, according to US authorities, was built in Honduras when Juan Orlando Hernandez

was president from 2014-2022.

Fifty Hondurans accused of drug trafficking have been extradited to the United States over the past decade, including ex-president Hernandez, who was sentenced in June in New York to 45 years in prison.

Washington has urged Honduras to reconsider its intention to leave a long-standing extradition treaty.

The extradition treaty remains in force, according to a US State Department spokesperson who spoke on background.

The official defended extradition as mutually beneficial to both countries.

“We strongly urge the government of Honduras to reconsider this that decision,” the spokesperson added in a statement to Reuters, arguing efforts to combat drug trafficking would be hurt if it stands.

Panama deports 30 migrants in second US-backed flight

Panamanian authorities deported a group of migrants to Ecuador on a second flight financed by the United States, as part of an agreement between the US and Panama to discourage irregular crossings and reduce the flow of mostly US-bound migration. The flight carrying 30 Ecuadoreans departed on Thursday evening en route to the coastal city of Manta, Ecuador, Panama’s migration service said.

The latest flight on Thursday followed a maiden journey that was financed by Washington in the middle of this month, which returned around 30 migrants to Colombia. - **Reuters**

Trump says IVF costs would be covered if he is elected

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said on Thursday that he will require the government or insurance companies to pay for IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) fertility treatments if he is elected in November, a move likely aimed at appealing to women and suburban voters.

“We want to produce babies in this country, right?” Trump said during a town hall-style campaign event in La Crosse, Wisconsin, on Thursday.

Earlier in the day in Michigan, Trump also said his administration would push for allowing new parents to deduct “major newborn expenses” from their taxes.

Opinion polls show Trump has lost ground with women voters since Vice-President Kamala Harris became the Democratic candidate in the November 5 election.

Harris led Trump by 49% to 36% – or 13 percentage points – among women voters in a Reuters/Ipsos poll published on Thursday, compared to her 9-point lead in polls conducted in July.

In speeches, Harris has attacked Trump’s abortion position and painted Republicans as a threat to women’s rights, including access to birth control, abortion medication and fertility treatments.

Trump, who as president appointed three of the justices who made up the majority that ended constitutional protection for abortion, has said that the matter is now to be decided by individual states.

Last week, Trump posted on his Truth Social account that his administration would be “great for women and their reproductive rights” – a statement that was viewed by some as an attempt by Trump to moderate his position and drew criticism from evangelical supporters.

Trump’s running mate, US Senator JD Vance, said on Sunday that Trump would veto a national abortion ban if one were to be passed by Congress.

Trump caused confusion on Thursday when he seemed to suggest in an interview with NBC News that he would vote in his home state of Florida this November in favour of an amendment to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution and overturn a current six-week abortion ban.

“I am going to be voting that we need more than six weeks,” Trump said.

However, his campaign quickly clarified his statement, saying that Trump has yet to make up his mind about the amendment, which is strongly opposed by the anti-abortion groups that have backed Trump’s candidacy.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B Anthony Pro-Life America, an anti-abortion lobby group, said in a statement that she spoke on the phone with Trump after his remarks and was told that he remains undecided.

A spokesperson for Harris, Sarafina Chitika, said on Thursday that Trump should not be trusted on issues relating to women’s reproductive care.

“Because Trump overturned Roe v. Wade, IVF has been ripped away in states across the country,” Chitika said.

IVF has emerged as a hot-button issue in this election, as Republicans nationwide have scrambled to contain backlash from a decision by the Alabama Supreme Court, which ruled in February that embryos were children.

That ruling left it unclear how to legally store, transport and use embryos, prompting some IVF patients to consider moving their frozen embryos out of the state.

Trump did not elaborate on how his administration would cover the cost of IVF treatments and changes to the US tax code, or whether he would seek congressional action on his proposals.

“Government is going to pay for it, or we’re going to get or mandate your insurance company to pay for it,” he said.

Not all states currently require insurance companies to cover IVF, which involves combining eggs and sperm in a laboratory dish to create an embryo for couples having difficulty conceiving.

IVF is expensive even with coverage and can cost thousands of dollars in drugs and medical procedures. - **Reuters**



US is ready to turn the page on Trump, says Harris

AFP/Reuters
Savannah, Georgia

Kamala Harris has declared that Americans are ready to turn the page on Donald Trump as she reached out to centrist voters in her first interview since her dramatic entry into November’s presidential election.

In the interview with CNN anchor Dana Bash, Harris sought to show she is in command of the issues and give Americans a sense of her policy positions with little more than two months until Election Day on November 5.

The 59-year-old Democrat insisted that she would be tough on illegal immigration and support controversial oil and gas fracking – while sticking to her liberal background by pledging a fairer economy.

“I am the best person to do this job,” Harris said in a joint interview with her running mate Tim Walz while on the campaign trail in the swing state of Georgia.

The first female and black and South Asian vice-president described Trump as “diminishing the character and the strength of who we are as Americans, really dividing our nation”.

“I think people are ready to turn the page on that,” she said. “People are ready for a new way forward.”

The Democrat also said that she would name a Republican to her cabinet if she wins, in another sign that she is reaching out to wavering middle-of-the-road voters.

“I think it’s important to have people at the table when some of the most important decisions are being made that have different views, different experiences. And I think it would be to the benefit of the American public to have a member of my cabinet who was a Republican,” she said.

Trump branded the interview “BORING!!!!” in a post on social media.

The Republican former president called Harris the “greatest flip-flop” as he addressed a rally in the swing state of Michigan, before mocking her appearance in the interview.

“She didn’t look like a leader to me,” he said.

Harris rejected criticism that she has shifted positions on politically sensitive issues including fracking, which she once opposed but now supports, and illegal migration over the Mexican border, where she has taken a harder line.

“As president I will not ban fracking,” she said – clearly aiming to settle the controversy in fossil fuel-rich Pennsylvania, one of the vital battleground states in what both candidates admit will be a tight election.

Addressing criticism that she had been too soft on immigration – a core part of Trump’s right-wing message – Harris said that as president she would sign tough legislation.

“We have laws that have to be followed and enforced, that address and deal with people who cross our border illegally, and there should be consequence,” Harris said.

Her comments appeared designed to court centrist voters worried by immigration and fuel costs.



Harris speaking during a campaign rally in Savannah. - **Reuters**

However, in a nod to her left-leaning supporters, she insisted that she had not fundamentally shifted.

“My values have not changed,” the vice-president said.

On another hot-button topic on the US political landscape, Harris urged a ceasefire in Gaza, but told CNN that she would not change President Joe Biden’s policies for key US ally Israel, including deliveries of weaponry.

“No, we have to get a deal done,” she said, adding that she was “unwavering” in her support for Israel but that “far too many innocent Palestinians have been killed”.

Harris dismissed a comment from Trump in which he questioned whether she was a black American.

“Same old tired playbook,” she said. “Next question, please.”

Trump, in a post on Truth Social, responded by saying: “I look so forward to Debating Comrade Kamala Harris and exposing her for the fraud she is.” Trump often falsely refers to Harris as a Marxist.

Harris meanwhile described for the first time how she was cooking with her family when Biden rang her on July 21 to say he was ending his White House bid.

“He told me what he had decided to do. And I asked him, ‘Are you sure?’ And he said, ‘Yes,’” she said.

Republicans had criticised Harris for not giving any interviews since Biden abruptly dropped out, following mounting concerns over his health and age at 81.

She has enjoyed a honeymoon period with surging polls and record fundraising, but has also faced scrutiny for keeping many of her policies vague as she pulls her campaign together at record speed.

Harris has also been cautious with the media since a widely panned interview on migration in

2021, but she offered a measured performance on CNN on Thursday.

Harris gave the interview while on a campaign bus tour of Georgia, one of the seven battleground states that are expected to decide the November 5 election.

A number of polls out on Thursday showed Harris ahead of Trump, if only marginally, with several of them finding increased support for Harris in battleground states.

Since becoming the Democratic candidate for president last month, Harris has surged in the polls, brought in hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign donations, and had a series of forceful campaign speeches.

She leads Trump 45% to 41% in a Reuters/Ipsos poll published on Thursday that showed the vice-president sparking new enthusiasm among voters.

Some critics suggested she might be less polished in unscripted settings like a TV interview, but she appeared to make no major mistakes on Thursday.

Jeremi Suri, history and public affairs professor at the University of Texas at Austin, said that Harris came across as knowledgeable and a “consensus builder” in the interview but she could have had “more concrete and specific answers” on what she would do on her first day as president.

Trump has himself been hitting the campaign trail hard in recent days, after a period where the 78-year-old former president appeared to struggle to find his footing against a new, younger, female candidate.

Speaking at the event in Pottersville, Michigan on Thursday, Trump targeted Harris on her immigration policy shifts, saying: “Where has she been for three and a half years?”

Harris and Trump are set to face off in their pivotal first debate on September 10 in Philadelphia.

Haiti gangs ‘aren’t even worried’ by Kenyan police

By Jean Daniel Senat
and Gerard Martinez
AFP

Two months after the first Kenyan police officers arrived in Haiti, little progress has been made against the country’s rapacious gangs – and the buildup of an international policing mission appears stalled.

With UN backing and funding from the United States, the mission was supposed to bring order to a nation where armed groups control 80% of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Yet the Kenyan police – now numbering 400 – and their Haitian counterparts have not recaptured any gang strongholds, with frustration palpable among city residents.

“The abuse from the gangs continues, and the bandits aren’t even worried,” motorcycle taxi driver Watson Laurent, 39, told AFP, adding he had been in favour of the international intervention.

“I thought they would restore peace and support our police who were overwhelmed,” he said. “I am



This picture taken earlier this month shows demonstrators behind burning street barricades during protests in Port-au-Prince by residents calling for help from the government and security forces, after gangs attacked neighbourhoods and set houses on fire. - **Reuters**

very concerned. I can’t sleep at night because of the explosions.”

Violence-plagued Haiti was plunged into further turmoil after a co-ordinated gang uprising in February saw attacks on the international airport and police stations, and led to the resignation of prime minister Ariel Henry.

The Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS), which Kenya had stepped up to lead, was already in planning and was final-

ly deployed to help Haiti tackle the soaring insecurity.

The first 200 Kenyans arrived in late June, with another 200 in July.

However, the force has “neither the sufficient personnel nor the equipment to launch real offensive operations against the gangs,” Diego Da Rin, Haiti analyst at the International Crisis Group non-governmental organisation (NGO), told AFP.

The Kenyans and the Haitian

National Police have protected key buildings and facilities in Port-au-Prince, while gangs – accused of rape, murder and kidnapping – have largely held on to their territory.

The only major operation that the Kenyan police were involved in was at the end of July, when the 400 Mawozo gang took the town of Ganthier, 28km (18 miles) east of Port-au-Prince.

However, ahead of the security forces’ arrival, gang members skipped town – only to retake Ganthier once the Kenyan and Haitian police left.

Kenyan police have said they have made “significant progress”, including helping take back “critical infrastructure, including the airport, from gang control” and opening “roads that have enabled the return of thousands of Haitians earlier displaced”.

Most of that progress took place before their arrival, said Da Rin.

Many Haitians are angry.

“The MSS needs to get to work,” said Yverose Amazan, a shopkeeper. “This situation has gone on too long.”

With a price tag of \$600mn,

the MSS is supposed to total 2,500 officers from Bangladesh, Benin, Chad, the Bahamas, Barbados and Jamaica – yet only the Kenyans have arrived, and with just 400 of their planned 1,000 officers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for more funding, with the latest figures showing only \$67.7mn out of the \$85mn pledged has been received.

The United States has contributed more than \$300mn in funds and equipment, including armoured vehicles.

The gang uprising was just the latest shock to hit a country grappling with the compounding effects of political crises, natural disasters and poverty.

Nearly 600,000 people have been displaced in Haiti, according to the United Nations, while some 4.5mn do not have enough to eat.

The prospects may look grim, but Amazan hopes the police mission “does something” by the time school starts in mid-September.

“I would like to be able to move around my country, as was the case before the proliferation of the gangs,” she said.

Former member of Italy’s Red Brigades held in Argentina

Buenos Aires police have arrested a former Red Brigades member who is wanted by Italy for crimes committed as part of the far-left guerrilla group, the Argentine government said on Thursday. Leonardo Bertulazzi, who was convicted in Italy of crimes including kidnapping and criminal association and is facing a 27-year jail term, had been in Argentina for years as a refugee, a status he lost under the current administration of President Javier Milei.

“Bertulazzi is responsible for crimes that undermined democratic values and the lives of many victims,” an Argentine government statement said. The Red Brigades were a radical left-wing group that operated in Italy during the 1970s and 1980s when they became known for committing terrorist crimes, including the kidnapping and killing in 1978 of former Italian prime minister and Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro. Bertulazzi was initially arrested in Buenos Aires in 2002, police said, but he was released after Argentine authorities refused to extradite him to Italy. - **Reuters**

Brazil judge-Musk standoff intensifies as Starlink assets get frozen

Reuters/AFP
Sao Paulo/Brasilia

An ongoing feud between a Brazilian Supreme Court justice and Elon Musk left social media platform X on the brink of being shut down in the country, while satellite Internet provider Starlink pushed to unblock its financial accounts in Brazil.

X was still working normally in Brazil yesterday, but the platform said late on Thursday that it expected Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes to order a shutdown “soon” after a court-imposed deadline expired for the company to identify a legal representative in Brazil.

Earlier this year, the judge ordered X to block certain accounts implicated in probes of so-called digital militias accused of spreading distorted news and hate.

Musk, denouncing the order as censorship, responded by closing the platform’s offices in Brazil. X, formerly known as Twitter, said at the time that its services

would still be available in Brazil.

Amid the underlying feud over X, Brazil’s Supreme Court also blocked the local bank accounts of the Starlink satellite Internet firm, which is 40% owned by Musk, leading the company to ask the court yesterday to suspend that decision.

In the appeal, seen by Reuters, Starlink claims it does not have “any interference” on X and that it has not failed to comply with any legal order directed at it.

The account block was issued in part due to a dispute over unpaid fines that X was ordered to pay by Brazil’s top court.

The Starlink appeal documents show that Moraes had asked for the blocking of resources from the satellite broadband company’s bank accounts and financial assets, properties, vessels and aircraft in Brazil to cover the fines owed by X.

Brazil’s top court was able to freeze around 2mn reais (\$354,226.81) from X’s accounts in Brazil so far, according to Starlink’s appeal.

Local newspaper *Folha* has reported the fines total at least 20mn reais (\$3.6mn),

but Reuters was not able to confirm the amount.

Musk has said on X that Starlink – which offers Internet connections to remote places – would continue to serve Brazilians, including the country’s military, for free “until this matter is resolved”.

The country’s army had said in a document sent to the lower house of Congress in June that an interruption of Starlink’s services would negatively affect its operations and could harm the strategic employment of specialised troops.

Asked about Musk’s spat with Justice Moraes, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva told a local radio station yesterday that “each and every citizen from any part of the world that has an investment in Brazil is subject to the Brazilian constitution and Brazilian laws.”

“Just because a guy has a lot of money doesn’t mean he can disrespect (the law),” the leftist leader added.

On Thursday Musk called Lula as Moraes’ “lapdog” in a post on X in which the billionaire also called Moraes a “dictator”.

The judge, at a separate event yesterday, reiterated his view that social media needs regulation to contain “hate speech”.

He did not provide any details about when he might issue an order blocking X.

“Those who violate democracy, who violate fundamental human rights, whether in person or through social media, must be held accountable,” Moraes said.

Under Brazilian laws governing the Internet, social media platforms are required to have a locally based representative.

To shut down X in Brazil, Moraes would have to order telecommunication companies to stop carrying X traffic.

Users, however, would still be able to dodge the blockage by using virtual private networks, or VPNs.

Moraes, who also presides over Brazil’s Superior Electoral Tribunal, has spearheaded a battle against disinformation in South America’s largest nation, clashing with Musk along the way.

Several of the X accounts he ordered suspended belonged to supporters of Brazil’s former far-right president Jair Bol-

sonaro, who tried to discredit the voting system in the 2022 election, which he lost.

Moraes’s Wednesday decision escalated the months-long feud.

Already in April, Moraes had ordered an investigation of Musk, accusing him of re-activating some of the banned accounts.

Musk and other critics have accuse Moraes of stifling free speech.

The billionaire has also posted a sarcastic message and doctored photo depicting Moraes as “Voldemort and a Sith Lord”, an allusion to the villains of the *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* sagas.

The US embassy in Brasilia said in a statement that it is “closely monitoring” the situation between Brazil’s Supreme Court and X, adding that the United States values “freedom of speech as a cornerstone of a healthy democracy” and that it “does not comment on local court decisions or legal disputes”.

Musk, in an X post yesterday, interpreted the US embassy’s remarks as a demonstration of support for him, saying that the comments were “appreciated”.

Taliban’s morality ministry won’t co-operate with UN Afghan mission

The Taliban government’s morality ministry said it would not co-operate with the United Nations mission in Afghanistan, calling it “an opposing side”.

The announcement comes after the UN mission (UNAMA) warned that a new morality law – requiring women to cover up completely and not raise their voices – would damage prospects for engagement with the international community.

The Taliban ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV)

said that “due to its continued propaganda, the PVPV will not provide any support or co-operation with UNAMA, which will be considered as an opposing side”.

“We want international organisations, countries, and those individuals who criticised the mentioned law to respect the religious values of Muslims and refrain from such criticisms and statements that insult Islamic values and sanctities,” the ministry said in a statement posted to social media on Thursday.

Last week, the United Nations special

rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, was banned from entering the country after joining other UN experts in a statement urging the international community to “not normalise the de facto authorities or their appalling human rights violations”.

Chief Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told local media Tolo News that Bennett “was appointed to Afghanistan to spread propaganda and he is not someone whose words we can trust”.

The Taliban authorities, which are yet to

be formally recognised by any nation, are still pushing to fill Afghanistan’s seat at the United Nations, which is held by a former official of the ousted foreign-backed government.

The Taliban government’s 35-article morality law was published in the official gazette on July 31.

It imposes wide-ranging rules on men’s clothing and attending prayers as well as bans on keeping photos of living beings, animal fighting, playing music in public, and non-Muslim holidays. – **AFP**

Trump team seeks to move hush money case to federal court

AFP
New York

Donald Trump’s lawyers have filed a request to have his hush money case moved to federal court as they seek a way to overturn the former US president’s felony conviction.

In their filing, the lawyers cited the recent Supreme Court ruling on presidential immunity and requested that the US District Court in Manhattan take over the case.

They also argued that the case violated the constitutional rights of the Republican presidential candidate ahead of November’s election.

“The ongoing proceedings will continue to cause direct and irreparable harm to President Trump – the leading candidate in the 2024 Presidential election – and voters located far beyond Manhattan,” lawyers Todd Blanche and Emil Bove wrote in their 64-page filing.

Trump was convicted by a New York jury in May of 34 counts of doctoring business records to cover up hush money payments to an adult entertainment actress to stop her from disclosing an alleged affair ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

He became the first former president ever convicted of a crime.

In July the US Supreme Court ruled that a former president enjoys broad immunity from criminal prosecution, throwing a legal wrench into the cases facing Trump.

The court held that former presidents enjoy “absolute immunity” from criminal prosecution for “official acts” taken while in office, but can still face criminal penalties for “unofficial acts”.

In their filing, Trump’s lawyers said the hush money case should be moved to federal court to afford him “an unbiased forum, free from local hostilities, where he can seek redress for these Constitutional violations”.

“Immediate access to such a forum is imperative and of the utmost urgency,” Blanche and Bove wrote.

Trump and his lawyers have repeatedly claimed the New York district attorney’s case was unfair and politically motivated.

His legal team in July asked the judge who presided over his hush money trial to throw out his conviction, citing the Supreme Court ruling.

New York Judge Juan Merchan has said he will rule on the dismissal motion on September 16 and hold sentencing – if still necessary – on September 18.

“Federal institutional interests associated with the Presidency, Congressional and FEC regulation of federal elections, and the integrity of the upcoming 2024 Presidential election are at stake,” Blanche and Bove said in their filing.

They also asked that sentencing be delayed until after litigation over the removal notice and said they would seek to have the case dismissed if their removal request was granted.

Trump has been doing everything in his power to delay multiple trials against him until after the election.

He faces charges in Washington and the state of Georgia related to efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost to President Joe Biden.

New Zealand’s Maori king dead

AFP/Reuters
Ngaruawahia, New Zealand

The king of New Zealand’s Maori died yesterday after heart surgery, with aides saying the beloved 69-year-old monarch, praised as a symbol of national unity, had “passed to the great beyond”.

“The death of Kiingi Tuheitia is a moment of great sadness for followers of Te Kīngitanga, Maoridom and the entire nation,” spokesman Rahui Papa said on social media.

Papa said that Tuheitia died peacefully surrounded by family, just days after celebrating the 18th anniversary of his coronation.

A symbol of Maori identity and kinship, Tuheitia occupied a largely ceremonial role and for most of his reign only spoke publicly once a year.

Nonetheless, he helped put New Zealand’s rich Indigenous heritage at the centre of public life.

He campaigned to reduce high rates of Indigenous incarceration and for whales to be granted legal personhood, hoping to protect them from the ravages of evermore polluted and warming seas.

“The death of Kiingi Tuheitia is a moment of great sadness,” Papa said in a statement. “A chief who has passed to the great beyond. Rest in love.”

After a string of health problems, Tuheitia had been in hospital trying to recover from heart surgery when he died.

His body was brought yesterday afternoon to lie in state at a *marae* – ceremonial grounds – near the north island town of Ngaruawahia.

Black-clad mourners flocked to the site as news of the king’s death spread.

New Zealand’s Maori currently make up about 17% of the population, or about 900,000 people.

Women carried wreaths of kawakawa leaves on their heads and were cloaked in patterned shawls. Some prayed gently as they placed bouquets of flowers.

Many were marked with facial tattoos – an indelible statement of pride in their Maori heritage.

They passed under an ochre-



Members of the Maori community gather after the news of the Maori King Kiingi Tuheitia’s death at the Turangawaewae Marae in Ngaruawahia, New Zealand. – **AFP**

red archway, ornately carved with beaked figures, and into the ceremonial grounds.

Inside, leaders sang songs of bereavement – the dirges and polyphonic melodies that have marked Maori funerals for generations.

A royal spokesperson told AFP that Tuheitia will lie in state before being buried on Wednesday at Mount Taupiri, the sacred “embracing mountain” that is the final resting place for Maori royals.

The process of electing his successor will be guided by a privy council.

During Tuheitia’s past periods of ill health, his eldest son Whatumoana Te Aa Paki took over official duties.

King Charles III, New Zealand’s formal head of state, led the tributes, saying that he was “shocked” having recently spoken to Tuheitia by phone.

“My wife and I were profoundly saddened to learn of the death of Kiingi Tuheitia,” he said in a statement. “I had the greatest pleasure of knowing Kiingi Tuheitia for decades.”

The UK monarch said he remembered with “immense fondness” his meetings with Tuheitia in New Zealand in 2015 and at Buckingham Palace last year.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon praised the king’s “unwavering commitment to his people” as he ordered flags



This picture taken in 2015 shows Britain’s then-Prince Charles and Camilla, then-Duchess of Cornwall, exchange gifts with Maori King Kiingi Tuheitia during a visit to Turangawaewae Marae in Ngaruawahia. – **AFP**

on government and public buildings to be flown at half-staff.

“Today, we mourn,” he said in a statement from Tonga, where he is attending the Pacific Islands Forum.

Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand’s former prime minister, said Tuheitia had been an advocate for Maori, for fairness, justice and prosperity.

The Kīngitanga – Maori King movement – was founded in 1858 with the aim of uniting New Zealand’s Indigenous Maori under a single sovereign, in the face of British colonisation.

The role of Maori monarch is not necessarily hereditary and the new leader will be appointed by heads of tribes associated with



This picture taken in 2006 shows King Tuheitia on his carved wooden throne during his coronation ceremony at Turangawaewae in Ngaruawahia. – **AFP**

the King Movement on the day of Tuheitia’s funeral but before he is buried, according to Radio New Zealand.

The Maori King is considered the paramount chief of several tribes, or *iwi*, but is not affiliated with all of them.

The monarch’s role has no judicial or legal authority in New Zealand and is largely ceremonial, but the position has significant political and symbolic weight.

Tuheitia was the seventh Kīngitanga monarch.

In 2006, Tuheitia succeeded his mother, Queen Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, who held the position for four decades.

During his reign he held countless ceremonies, visited the United

Nations, met Pope Francis at the Vatican and represented a New Zealand delegation at the Olympics in Paris.

Tuheitia called a *hui* (national meeting) in January, when he asked for unity among Maori in response to concerns that the policies of the coalition government are undermining Indigenous rights.

In March, Tuheitia made headlines with an impassioned call for whales to be granted the same legal rights as people, in a bid to protect vulnerable species.

He wanted the marine mammals to have inherent rights, such as having a healthy environment, to allow the restoration of their populations.

Chief of staff Ngira Simmonds told local media he would miss the king’s love of music and community.

“I think what he will leave behind for this nation at large was his strong belief for unity, that unity is the best way forward for us as a nation,” Simmonds said.

Around half a million New Zealanders tuned in to watch the last funeral of a Maori monarch, when Tuheitia’s mother was buried in 2006.

Maori expert Carwyn Jones told AFP, saying that thousands would likely attend in person. “Here is an opportunity to see (the Kīngitanga) operating and being a focal point for Maori”

Canada rail union launches court challenges to back-to-work order

Reuters
Ottawa

The union representing workers at Canada’s two main rail companies said yesterday that it had filed court challenges against rulings by the country’s industrial labour board that forced them back to work.

Last Saturday, the board accepted a request from the government to order more than 9,000 Teamsters members back to work at Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Kansas City and to impose binding arbitration.

The union had already said it would appeal the rulings on the grounds that they

were a win for the railways and could lead to the imposition of future contracts, eroding workers’ bargaining power.

“These decisions, if left unchallenged, set a dangerous precedent where a single politician can bust a union at will,” said Paul Boucher, president of the Teamsters rail union.

“The right to collectively bargain is a constitutional guarantee. Without it, unions lose leverage to negotiate better wages and safer working conditions for all Canadians,” he said in a statement.

The legal challenges – which could take years to sort out – are unlikely to impact the Teamsters dispute but could set a precedent for future labour issues.

When Labour Minister Steven MacKin-

non referred the matter to the board, he cited powers the country’s labour code gave him.

The union says this infringed their rights under Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that the board had acted unreasonably.

Bruce Curran, an employment law expert at the University of Manitoba, said that the Teamsters’ argument had a decent chance of success, noting the union was arguing Ottawa had overstepped the mark in the way it had used the labour code.

The court “likely will have the option of narrowing the kind of circumstances in which they can use this in the future,” he said in an interview.

The union filed the challenges in the Fed-

eral Court of Appeal and asked that the proceedings be expedited.

However Canada’s justice system is famously slow-moving and whoever loses the appeal is likely to take it to the Supreme Court, which means the case could take years to resolve.

In an e-mailed statement, CN Rail said arbitration was a neutral process that did not favour one party over another. CPKC declined to comment.

MacKinnon’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

He has said he is confident his referral to the board would survive a court challenge.

The two companies locked out the workers earlier this month after talks failed to produce a new labour deal.

Militant attacks ‘delay launch of China-backed airport’ in Pakistan

Reuters
Islamabad

The start of operations at a Chinese-funded airport in Pakistan’s Balochistan province has been pushed back for a security review after last week’s deadly attacks by separatist militants in the area, government and aviation sources said.

More than 70 people were killed in the co-ordinated attacks across Balochistan, where militants seeking the resource-rich region’s secession have been targeting government forces and projects being developed as part of the \$65bn China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Part of President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative, the programme in Pakistan is also developing a deep-water port close to the new \$200mn airport in Gwadar, a joint venture between Pakistan, Oman and China that is close to completion.

It will handle domestic and international flights, according to Pakistan’s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and will be one of the country’s biggest airports.

The initial plan was for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to inaugurate the airport on August 14 alongside Chinese officials, but that event was called off after an ethnic Baloch rights group started a sit-in protest, the officials said.

Following last week’s attacks, the deadliest in years, two officials at the CAA and two others in the Balochistan provincial government told Reuters that the start of flights would be delayed as authorities review security in the region.

“The Chinese already had

concerns about the security situation, and the recent attacks will definitely cause more delay,” one senior provincial government official said, requesting anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Asked about the delay and security concerns, China’s foreign ministry said: “China is willing to work with the Pakistani side to continue to do a good job in the relevant security work and ensure the safe and smooth progress of the corridor construction.”

A provincial government spokesperson declined to comment and Pakistan’s information minister did not respond to a request for a comment.

Although no Chinese projects were targeted in the latest militant attacks, they have been frequently attacked in the past by the insurgents, who view China as a foreign invader trying to gain control of the region’s resources.

It is not clear whether Beijing has offered Pakistan direct assistance on the security management of Chinese projects.

Special Chinese security teams worked closely with Pakistani security agencies to trace the insurgents behind a suicide bombing which targeted Chinese teachers in the southern city of Karachi in 2022.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), one of several separatist militant groups involved in the low-level insurgency for decades, claimed responsibility for last week’s attacks.

Pakistan’s army said yesterday that it had started intelligence based operations against the militants to respond to the assaults.

Germany deports convicted Afghans to home country

Germany said yesterday that it had deported Afghans convicted of crimes back to their home country for the first time since Taliban authorities took power in 2021, as Berlin faces pressure to get tougher on migration.

The 28 Afghan nationals were all “convicted of serious crimes and had no right to remain in Germany”, government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit told reporters.

A chartered flight bound for Kabul took off from Leipzig airport just before 0500 GMT, authorities said.

It comes exactly a week after a deadly knife attack allegedly committed by a Syrian man at a street festival in the western city of Solingen shocked Germany, with the Islamic State (IS) group claiming responsibility.

It also comes ahead of closely-watched regional elections in two eastern German states tomorrow, where the far-right, anti-immigration AfD party is expected to make big gains.

The deportations were “necessary to ensure that trust in the rule of law continues to exist”, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said.

Germany did not have “direct contact with the Taliban or Afghanistan”, Faeser said, thanking unnamed partners for their diplomatic assistance.

The deportation flight was the result of two months of “secret Germany completely stopped deportations to Afghanistan and closed its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban returned to power in August 2021.

Germany was sending a message with the deportation flight, said Hebestreit, “including a signal to potential criminals or people planning crimes in our country”.

Among those sent back yesterday were violent offenders and sex offenders, local authorities said, including an Afghan man who took part in the gang rape of a 14-year-old girl.

Green party co-leader Omid Nouripour welcomed the expulsion of serious criminals, but said it did not signal the start of large-scale deportations to Afghanistan.

“Law-abiding people, especially families and children who have fled from radical Islamists” are protected in Germany, he said.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s government has faced growing calls to curb illegal migration and take tougher action against dangerous and convicted asylum seekers, following a series of high-profile crimes.

Germany is still reeling from last week’s knife attack in Solingen that left three people dead, allegedly committed by a 26-year-old Syrian man.

The suspect was meant to have been deported to Bulgaria a while back, but authorities were unable to locate him. – **AFP**

Russian strikes on Ukraine’s Kharkiv kill at least six

AFP
Kyiv

Russian strikes killed at least six people in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, including a 14-year-old girl at a playground, and wounded dozens more, officials said yesterday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had dropped a guided bomb on the city and urged Kyiv’s allies to take “strong decisions” to bolster his country’s air defence systems.

Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, lies around 40km (25 miles) from the Russian border and has been bombed persistently by Russian forces since they launched

their invasion in February 2022.

A multi-storey residential building and a children’s playground were among the sites hit in the strike.

“Unfortunately, the death toll has risen to six people,” Kharkiv region Governor Oleg Syneghubov said in a post on Telegram hours after the attack.

A 14-year-old girl was among those killed, Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said.

An AFP journalist in the city reported hearing loud explosions ringing out during the attack yesterday afternoon.

Medics and emergency services were working at the scenes.

At least 55 people were wounded, Klymenko said.

Unverified images circulating on social media showed large plumes of grey smoke billowing from a Soviet-era residential building and a blaze ripping through the upper floors.

“We need strong decisions from our partners to stop this terror,” Zelensky said in a post on social media.

“We need long-range capabilities,” he added, referring to Kyiv’s appeals to allies to lift restrictions on the use of Western-supplied missiles inside Russian territory and deliver more longer-range weapons.

“We need the implementation of air defence agreements for Ukraine. This is about saving lives,” he added.

The Kremlin has repeatedly insisted that its forces do not target civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, despite widespread documentation of civilian and residential areas being hit in aerial bombardments.

Moscow’s forces attempted to capture Kharkiv in the early stages of their invasion but were pushed back.

They launched a fresh ground offensive in the Kharkiv region in May, capturing a number of villages close the countries’ shared border.

Russian strikes earlier yesterday in the neighbouring region of Sumy left at least two people dead and 13 wounded, the interior ministry said separately.

Macron’s reluctance to name new PM fuels frustration

AFP
Paris

Almost two months after France’s inconclusive legislative elections, impatience is growing with the reluctance of President Emmanuel Macron to name a new prime minister in an unprecedented standoff with opposition parties.

Never in the history of the Fifth Republic – which began with constitutional reform in 1958 – has France gone so long without a permanent government, leaving the previous administration led by Prime Minister Gabriel Attal in place as caretakers.

A left-wing coalition emerged from the election as the biggest political force but with nowhere near enough seats for an overall majority, while Macron’s centrist faction and the far-right make up the two other major groups in the National Assembly.

To the fury of the New Popular Front (NFP) coalition, Macron earlier this week rejected their choice of economist and civil servant Lucie Castets, 37, to become premier, arguing a left-wing government would be a “threat to institutional stability”.

Macron insisted during a Thursday visit to Serbia that he was making “every effort” to “achieve the best solution for the country”.

“I will speak to the French people in due time and within the right framework,” he said.

Macron’s task is to find a prime minister with whom he can work but who above all can find enough support in the National Assembly to escape swift ejection by a no-confidence motion.

Despite the lack of signs of progress in public, attention is crystallising on one possible “back to the future” option.

Former Socialist Party grandee Bernard Cazeneuve, 61, could return to the job of prime minister which he held for less than half a year under the presidency of Francois Hollande from 2016-2017.

He is better known for his much longer stint as interior minister under Hollande, which encompassed the radical Islamist attacks on Paris in November 2015.

However, Cazeneuve receives far from whole-hearted support even on the left, where some in the Socialist Party (PS) regard him with suspicion for leaving when it first struck an alliance with hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) – a party which in turn sees the ex-premier as too centrist.

Another option could be the Socialist mayor of the Paris suburb of Saint-Ouen, Karim Bouamrane, 51, who has said he would consider taking the job if asked.

Bouamrane is widely admired for seeking to tackle inequality and insecurity in the low-income district.

The stalemate has ground on first through the Olympics and now the Paralympics, with Macron showing he is in no rush to resolve the situation.

“We are in the most serious political crisis in the history of the Fifth Republic,” Jerome Jaffre, a political scientist at the Sciences Po university, told AFP.



Macron at the ‘Forum on Youth and Artificial Intelligence’ in Novi Sad, northern Serbia. – **Reuters**

Europe needs own AI model to ‘catch up’, says Macron

President Emmanuel Macron, on a visit to Serbia, said yesterday that Europe needs to invest in its own artificial intelligence (AI) model to catch up with China and the United States.

Speaking at a forum in the city of Novi Sad, the French leader noted that “we Europeans are a bit behind”.

“The Chinese and the Americans invest a lot more,” Macron added during the trip that included France and Serbia inking a deal for 12 Rafale warplanes – in a shift away from Russian weapons for the Balkan nation.

The French president encouraged Europe to “catch up, innovate, invest much more” to be on par with Washington and Beijing, adding that AI “should serve collective goals”.

Europe should develop a part-public, part-private innovation model, Macron said.

For the European Union, which has implemented a unique regulatory framework in an effort to control the technological advances of AI, the “priority is to invest”, the head of state said.

“Once we reach a moment of maturity, that is when we can turn regulation into a competitive advantage,” he said.

Belgrade will lead the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, while France is gearing up to host an AI summit in February 2025.

The widely fighter jet deal will see Serbia receive nine single-seat and three two-seat jets by 2029, according to Dassault chief executive Eric Trappier. – **AFP**

Syrian artist destroys statue outside UN in political message



Syrian exiled sculptor Khaled Dawwa (top) with the help of relatives of people who disappeared in Syria, destroy his giant art work *The King of Holes*, depicting a potentate with a massive body, as part of a protest on the occasion of International Day of the Disappeared, in front of the United Nations offices in Geneva. – **AFP**

AFP
Geneva

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

Using saws and hammers, relatives of disappeared Syrians helped the artist break apart the wood, plaster and foam statue on the International Day of the Disappeared.

“We are here to protest against the system, to say, ‘enough! We have a right to know the truth,’” the 39-year-old sculptor, who lives in exile in France, told AFP.

Dawwa’s 3.5m (11’ 6”) colossus, *The King of Holes*, depicted a potentate with a massive body, reflecting the artist’s condemnation of oppressive power, before it was thrashed to pieces.

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

He created it in 2021 in Paris with the intention of demolishing it later.

“It is a fragile piece that is difficult to keep,” he said.

Dawwa took part in Syria’s so-called Arab Spring demonstrations in 2012 that escalated into a bloody, protracted war.

He was in his studio in May 2013 when he was severely wounded by bullet fragments from a government helicopter and jailed for two months after leaving hospital.

Echoing the conflict, the legs, face and arms of the artwork are riddled with small holes.

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

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

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

Around 100,000 people have disap-

peared in the Syria as part of government repression or kidnappings by anti-regime militias, according to several non-profit organisations.

Ahmad Helmi, 34, said he had fled Syria after he was arrested by the country’s secret services as a university student, and jailed for three years.

He followed Dawwa to Geneva to help him destroy the statue.

“The pain of three years in prison, three years of torture...doesn’t count to one day of the pain my mum experienced every single day when I was disappeared,” said Helmi. “Hundreds of thousands of families and mothers are in Syria and around the world today experiencing the same pain.”

The Syrian war began after the repression of anti-government protests in 2011 and spiralled into a complex conflict drawing in foreign armies and religious militants, killing more than 500,000 people and displacing millions.

Dawwa says the statue’s holes are like those made by “animals that eat wood”.

“For me, that’s like hope,” he said. “There is always something that eats at it.”

Thailand’s anti-graft body opens new probe into embattled political opposition

Reuters
Bangkok

Thailand’s anti-graft body yesterday said it was investigating 44 members of the disbanded Move Forward party, following a complaint seeking their lifetime bans from politics for backing legislation aimed at amending a law against royal insults.

It comes less than a month after a court ordered the dissolution of

the popular Move Forward, the surprise winners of last year’s election, over its campaign pledge to amend the law, which shields the powerful crown from criticism. Among the 44 under investigation are 25 current lawmakers of the People’s Party, Move Forward’s latest incarnation and the largest party in parliament.

Thailand’s lese-majeste law, or article 112 of the criminal code, is among the strictest of its kind in the world and carries punishments

of up to 15 years in jail for each perceived insult of the royal family. Critics of the law say it has been misused for political purposes to stifle opposition.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission, which has a broad remit that goes beyond graft, said no charges had yet been filed and not all 44 would be summoned. “We have started calling relevant individuals to hear the facts,” its deputy secretary-general Sarote Phuen-grampan told Reuters. “This step is

to collect evidence, but no one has been charged yet.”

Under its procedures, if the panel finds sufficient evidence of unethical behaviour, it would then charge people, who can present a defence before a decision is taken on whether to prosecute them in court.

If the Supreme Court finds they committed the offence, they could be banned from politics for life, the same fate suffered last year by a Move Forward politician who made social media posts that were

deemed disrespectful to the monarchy.

The latest case was brought by conservative activists in February, two days after the Constitutional Court ordered Move Forward to drop its campaign to change the lese-majeste law. Move Forward’s anti-establishment policies including military reform and undoing business monopolies, earned it huge urban and youth support, but clashed with powerful interests in Thailand, as demonstrated when

lawmakers allied with the royalist military blocked it from forming a government. Senior People’s Party lawmaker Sirikanya Tansakul said she was preparing a legal defence and was not worried about the threat of a lifetime ban. “What’s more concerning is that (an unfavourable) decision would set a new precedent: trying to amend can mean a serious ethical violation,” she said.

“Amending section 112 or any law would be impossible.”

East Timor PM thanks intl community on anniversary of independence vote

East Timor’s leader thanked the international community yesterday as his country celebrated the 25th anniversary of its referendum on independence from Indonesia, with visiting UN chief Antonio Guterres urging the world to do more to support the young democracy.

Thousands of citizens flocked to a stadium in the capital Dili to commemorate the tiny Southeast Asian nation’s 1999 vote, which paved the way for its current democratic system. “Remember, our nation’s independence is also thanks to the solidarity and efforts of the international community... especially the United Nations, which helped with the referendum process on August 30, 1999,” Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao said at the event, which was also attended by Guterres and Timorese President Jose Ramos-Horta.

The poll saw nearly 80% of East Timorese vote to split from Indonesia, ending a brutal 24-year military occupation that claimed up to 250,000 lives through fighting, disease and starvation. The vote briefly sparked joy before Indonesian security forces and militias destroyed infrastructure and displaced hundreds of thousands to other parts of Indonesia.

The post-referendum terror killed around 1,400 people before the mainly Catholic country of 1.34mn was recognised as an independent state in 2002. Guterres said that after 25 years, the former Portuguese colony still struggled to provide essentials like food, education and healthcare, adding international support had been insufficient. “The nation has won the battle for independence and democracy, and now it must win the battle for development,” he said at Friday’s event, appealing “to the international community to strongly support East Timor”. —AFP

AFP
Beppu

Typhoon Shanshan dumped record rains yesterday as it slowly churned up through Japan, triggering transport havoc and widespread warnings of landslides with up to six people killed. The typhoon, one of the fiercest to hit Japan in decades, has weakened and was forecast to ease to tropical cyclone strength by Monday, though gusts were still reaching 126km per hour early Friday.

Even before making landfall on the island of Kyushu, a landslide caused by the heavy rains preceding it killed three members of the same family late Tuesday in Aichi prefecture, around 1,000km away. Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi confirmed four deaths but said that in one case, “the relation to the typhoon was being studied”.

Two more were feared dead and two others were missing, Hayashi said.

Eight people were seriously hurt and 70 others had light injuries, he said, with many hurt by broken glass after the typhoon smashed windows and ripped tiles off roofs when it slammed into Kyushu on Thursday with gusts up to 252 kph. Almost 200 buildings were damaged.

Typhoons in the region have been forming closer to coastlines, intensifying more rapidly and lasting longer over land due to climate change, according to a study released in July.

Another published by World Weather Attribution (WWA) on Thursday said that climate change had turbocharged Typhoon Gae-mi, which killed dozens of people across the Philippines, Taiwan and China last month.

A similar rapid attribution analysis from Imperial College London using peer-reviewed methodology calculated that Ty-

phoon Shanshan’s winds were made 26% more likely by a warming planet.

“Without phasing out fossil fuels, the root cause of climate change, typhoons will bring even greater devastation to Japan,” said Ralf Toumi, director of the Grantham Institute at Imperial.

Japanese authorities issued their highest alert in several areas, with more than five million people advised to evacuate, although it was unclear how many did.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued alerts for possible landslides in many parts of Kyushu and as far away as Shizuoka on the main island of Honshu, the Tokyo region and nearby Kanagawa. Footage from Japanese broadcaster NHK showed a car park in Kanagawa prefecture with vehicles half-submerged in brown water, with authorities there urging residents to move to higher floors after a local river flooded.

Some parts of Kyushu saw record rains for August, with the town of Misato recording a staggering 791.5mm in 48 hours, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Kitakyushu in Kyushu saw 474 mm in the 24 hours to Friday morning, the most since 2012, when comparative data began to be collected. Nearby Kunimi had 384.5 mm, the most since records began in 1977.

The holiday resort of Beppu in Kyushu suffered no major damage, but the typhoon left tourists stranded and bored, with the onsen hot springs, a monkey park and even 24-hour convenience stores shut.

“This is my first time (here). I was very looking forward to it,” morose visitor Nobuhiko Takagishi from Tokyo told AFP. “But it will be a trip to remember. A trip when I couldn’t do anything.”

“Tourists must be in big trouble. They came here with no preparation, and they are stranded,”



Typhoon Shanshan weakened to a tropical storm yesterday, but was still dumping heavy rains as it slowly churned through Japan.

said resident Hiroko Handa, 48. Power cuts hit more than 250,000 Kyushu households but the utility operator said Friday that only 6,500 were still without electricity as engineers repaired transmission lines.

Overnight, many motorways were fully or partially closed in Kyushu, as well as others further afield, media reports said. Shinkansen bullet trains remained suspended in Kyushu and were also halted on the major route between Tokyo and Osaka, with operators warning of disruptions elsewhere.

Japan Airlines and ANA had already announced the cancellation of more than 600 flights between them for Friday, having scrapped a similar number the previous day, affecting almost 50,000 passengers.



People carrying umbrellas, walk across a street amid heavy rainfall in Tokyo yesterday.

Sri Lanka inflation dips to lowest point since crisis

AFP
Colombo

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka’s annual inflation dipped sharply to 0.5% in August, the lowest year-on-year rate since the country declared bankruptcy in April 2022, official data showed Friday. August inflation was down from 2.4% in July and 4.0% the same time last year.

The reading came three weeks ahead of Sri Lanka’s first election since the unprecedented economic crisis that sparked months of food, fuel and pharmaceutical shortages. The resulting civil unrest forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to briefly flee the country and resign from abroad. At the time, inflation peaked at nearly 70 percent. The Census and Statistics Department said the current decline was attributable to reductions in electricity and water tariffs, fuel prices and housing costs. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka expects overall inflation in 2024 to remain well below five percent.

Opposition parties have vowed to renegotiate the terms of an IMF bailout secured by President Ranil Wickremesinghe in early 2023. The bailout has led to painful austerity measures, including higher taxes. The IMF has said it is willing to listen to alternative proposals from rival political parties, but stressed that the benchmarks set in the agreement must be met.

- **Factories under pressure after recent protest shutdowns**
- **Floods disrupt cotton supply via key Chittagong port**
- **Imports could be diverted to India, Vietnam**
- **Energy shortages continue to hamper factory operations**

Reuters
Dhaka

Garment factories in Bangladesh, one of the world’s biggest clothing production hubs, are struggling to complete orders on time as flooding disrupts their cotton supplies -- exacerbating a backlog caused by recent political turmoil.

Bangladesh is a leading global cotton importer due to the size of its textile and garment industry, but the devastating floods mean few trucks and trains have been able to bring supplies to factories from Chittagong port over the last week, industry officials and analysts said. The disruption,

on top of the unrest and protests that led to factory closures earlier this month, have caused garment production to fall by 50%, said Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

“The industry is now under immense pressure to meet deadlines, and without a swift resolution, the supply chain could deteriorate even further,” Hatem said. Bangladesh was ranked as the third-largest exporter of clothing in the world last year, after China and the European Union, according to the World Trade Organization, exporting \$38.4bn worth of clothes in 2023.

At the clothing factory she runs in the capital, Dhaka, Rubana Huq is counting the cost of lost production.

“Even for a moderate-sized company like ours, which makes 50,000 shirts a day and if the price of one single shirt is \$5, there was \$250,000 of production loss,” said Huq, a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

She said some garment plants were slowing resuming production, but estimated that complete recovery “would be at least six months away”, warning that Bangladeshi manufacturers could lose 10%-15% of business



Women work in a garment factory in Dhaka in this file photo.

to other countries. Bangladesh’s readymade garments industry, which supplies many of the world’s best-known fashion brands, accounts for more than 80% of the country’s total export earnings.

Buyers are adopting a cautious approach and could potentially delay new orders, said Shahidullah Azim, a director of the BGMEA industry group. “The longer this uncertainty persists, the more challenging it becomes for us to maintain the momentum

we have built,” he told Reuters. The Bangladesh Meteorological Department said flood conditions could persist if the monsoon rains continued, as water levels were receding very slowly. Some cotton shipments could get diverted to India, Pakistan and Vietnam, commodity analysts said. “We are already hearing and seeing some cotton for prompt delivery wanted by Pakistan and Vietnam,” said Louis Barbera, partner and analyst at VLM Commodities based in New Jersey.

New orders shifted from Bangladesh could also be accommodated in southern India, said Atul Ganatra, president of the Cotton Association of India. Even before the floods and political unrest, the Bangladeshi garment industry was grappling with power shortages that remain a problem, said Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, vice president at the country’s knitwear manufacturers and exporters association.

“Energy shortages continue to hamper our operations,” he said.

UK seeks to speed up migrant returns

AFP
London

Britain's Labour government is planning "a major surge" in returns of irregular migrants to countries including Iraq, an official said, as it tries to clear an asylum backlog. The interior ministry has posted a contract seeking commercial partners to support the "reintegration" of people with no right to live in the UK in their home countries.

The contract, worth £15mn (\$19.7mn) over three years, was published last week and first reported by the *Financial Times* on Thursday. The advert says the ministry is seeking "to identify appropriate reintegration delivery providers" to help migrants return from the UK to 11 different countries.

The countries are Albania, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Iraq, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. Contractors will help with provision of food packs, assist the tracing of family members and provide support with accessing job markets among other things, according to the bid notice.

Interior minister Yvette Cooper announced last week that the government aims over the next six months to achieve the highest rate of deportations of failed asylum

seekers in five years. The goal is to remove more than 14,000 people by the end of the year, according to UK media reports.

"The government is planning to deliver a major surge in immigration enforcement and returns activity to remove people with no right to be in the UK and ensure the rules are respected and enforced," a ministry spokesperson said in a statement.

"Continued international co-operation with partner nations plays a critical role in this, and we will be working closely with a number of countries across the globe as part of the mission to end irregular migration."

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, elected to office early last month, has also pledged to "smash the gangs" of people smugglers bringing irregular migrants to Britain on small boats sailing across the Channel.

More than 20,000 migrants have arrived in the UK after crossing from France on rudimentary vessels so far this year, according to the latest figures. That is marginally up on last year's data for the same period, but down on 2022. Refugee charities have urged the government to create more safe routes to deter people from making the perilous journey. Official figures released last week showed that almost 119,000 people were waiting for a decision on their asylum application at the end of June 2024.

Gearing up for climate protest



Preparations are underway in creating an "Upgrade Democracy Camp", by members of the climate change protest group Extinction Rebellion in Windsor, west of London. Extinction Rebellion supporters from groups across the UK are gathering in Windsor Home Park for three days of activities to "propose democratic renewal as the answer to the climate and nature emergencies".

PM Starmer says Harris has brought 'profound change' to US race

AFP
Berlin

UK leader Keir Starmer has said that US Vice-President Kamala Harris replacing President Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee has shaken up the White House race. Since Biden, 81, dropped out five weeks ago due to concerns about his age, 59-year-old Harris has re-invigorated her party, edging ahead of Republican candidate Donald Trump in opinion polls.

Delegates rode a wave of optimism as she was officially crowned last week at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a gathering attended by senior figures from Starmer's Labour Party. The British Prime Minister touched on the US election during a huddle with UK political reporters Wednesday during a trip to Berlin, where Starmer met German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

"There's obviously been a profound change in the last few weeks," said Starmer, when asked by AFP if he had been impressed by the energy that Harris has injected into the campaign. "I think everyone can see that. You saw the convention just in recent days," he added.

Centre-left Labour, back in power in Britain after 14 years in opposition, has long had close links with the Democratic Party, seeing it as a sort of unofficial sister party. In an interview with the New Statesman magazine published earlier this month, London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan said it was "obvious" his support lay with the Democrats.

"I'm a member of the Labour Party - we're a social democratic party. I want the Democrats to win," said Khan, who has had a long-running feud with Trump. "It's no secret many Labour Party members go and volunteer for the Democrats during presidential elections.

British hospitality eyes big bucks ahead of Oasis tour

AFP
London

Fans are not the only ones eagerly awaiting next year's Oasis reunion tour: British hoteliers and pub owners are looking forward to a boom in business, with hopes of a Taylor Swift-style economy boost.

The price of hotel rooms shot up in host cities including Oasis's hometown Manchester in northwestern England as soon as the tour dates were announced.

"It's clear the pull of live music is as strong as ever. Hotels will get booked up quickly as fans secure tickets, and pubs, bars and restaurants will all be packed next summer with concert-going fans," said Kate Nicholls, Chief Executive of UK Hospitality, which represents the industry.

"We expect to see huge demand from fans, both from the UK and from abroad, and that will no doubt deliver a multi-million-pound boost to the hospitality sector next year."

Warring brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher have put their 15-year feud behind them to reunite for the tour.

The Britpop duo behind hit songs including "Wonderwall" and "Champagne Supernova" announced on Tuesday they would play an initial 14 gigs next year in Cardiff, Manchester, London, Edinburgh and the Irish capital, Dublin, starting in July 2025.

Furious fans accused one hotel in Manchester of cancelling their reservations for the dates to relist the rooms for three times the price. The hotel blamed a "technical error", but consumer body Which? said it was concerned about such practices and called on customers to be vigilant.

"Some accommodation providers will charge whatever they can get away with when a major event comes to town," said Lisa Webb, a consumer law expert at Which?, adding that some hotels had made "eye-watering price" rises ahead of the tour. One fan in Manchester living near the city's Heaton Park venue offered an innovative solution in a viral post on X.

She offered concert-goers a free camp-

ing spot in her garden in exchange for a ticket. The tour looks set to "join the likes of Taylor Swift, Harry Styles and Beyonce in delivering record-setting shows", added UK Hospitality's Nicholls. The economic impact of the European leg of Taylor Swift's "Eras Tour" - which ended last week in London - went far beyond ticket sales.

British bank Barclays estimated in a study in May that Swift's tour would inject almost £1bn (\$1.3bn) into the UK economy, with fans splurging on tickets, travel, accommodation and eating and drinking out.

Several economists also believed that the tour and related activities could have marginally boosted inflation.

Tuesday's tour announcement delighted fans who had despaired of ever seeing brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher perform together again. As expected, sky-high demand led to a further three dates being announced on Thursday. The three extra concerts take the total announced so far for the UK and Ireland in 2025 to 17.

More on "continents outside of Europe

later next year," are also expected according to a statement posted on Oasis's website. Ticket prices were also unveiled on Thursday with seated tickets priced at around £75 and standing tickets at around £150. Ticket sales, merchandise and possible licensing for a film alone could generate a £400mn profit, said Matt Grimes, a music industry researcher at Birmingham City University.

After accounting for expenses and paying their teams, the Gallagher brothers could come away with £50mn each, he told AFP. They will not be the only ones to profit. "When a band like Oasis comes to your city to play, you've got people coming along. So hotels make money, public transport companies make money, food outlets make money, licensed pubs make money," he said.

UK tickets will go on sale on Saturday (today) at 9am. "They will be gone before midday," Grimes added.

"This is probably going to be perhaps a once in a lifetime event, so people will find the money to buy the tickets."

Oasis fans on tenterhooks for ticket sale

Reuters
London

Oasis tickets go on sale in Britain and Ireland today (Saturday) for the group's long-awaited reunion, likely attracting old and new fans in a tour being billed as the "big event of 2025". The Britpop band announced their comeback this week to much fanfare, 15 years after they broke up when lead guitarist and main songwriter Noel Gallagher said he could no longer work with frontman and brother Liam after a number of public spats.

Mark Sutherland, a music business consultant and journalist, said the audience was likely to be made up of people who had the "best years of their lives soundtrack" by Oasis, and younger fans who

know a few hits and want to experience them live. Oasis opened a pre-sale ballot to those who can answer a question about the band, before tickets go on general release at 9am in Britain and 8am in Ireland today. Fans have also been advised to be vigilant of scams.

Harry Kind from consumer group Which? said Oasis and ticket sellers had put measures in place to deter people seeking to profit from the clamour for tickets, such as the ballot. Oasis originally announced 14 shows in Cardiff, Manchester, where the group formed in 1991, London, Edinburgh and Dublin, but on Thursday added three dates after "unprecedented demand". Fans are not just trying to get into the shows.

Cheap hotel rooms appear to have been replaced by pricier options on travel sites in cities like Manchester and some people

reported on social media that hotels had sought to cancel bookings they had made prior to the tour dates being announced, in a bid to relist them at a higher price. The gigs are expected to provide a multi-million pound boost for Britain's hospitality sector and economy.

"There will be huge sums of money spent on merchandise, travel, hotels, bars and restaurants, as well as creating jobs which are all linked directly to these gigs," said Paul Haywood-Schiefer, senior manager at tax advisory firm Blick Rothenberg.

Although Oasis, one of the biggest British bands of recent decades, said plans were underway to go to other continents, fans were likely to fly in from abroad for the British shows. "If you want to see Oasis, really the best place to do it is here in the UK where they mean so much," Sutherland said.



Liam Gallagher performs at the Brit Awards in a file photo.

Uproar in Malayalam film industry



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

India growth slows to 6.7% on lower consumer spending

India's economic growth slowed to 6.7% on-year in the April-June quarter, official data showed yesterday, as lower government outlays and lacklustre consumer spending weighed on the world's fifth-largest economy. Yesterday's reading still places the world's most populous country among the fastest-growing major economies globally. But the figure is unwelcome news for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose party suffered the surprise loss of its parliamentary majority after elections in June. It may also put pressure on the Reserve Bank of India to cut interest rates after holding them steady at 6.50% for more than 18 months. Year-on-year gross domestic product grew at its slowest pace in five quarters and came in below the Indian central bank's estimate of 7.1%. The Indian economy had expanded to 7.8% on-year in the previous March quarter. Experts say the pace of

growth slowed in part due to sluggish government capital expenditure. Businesses have also blamed protracted summer heatwaves in parts of the country for hampering store footfalls and urban consumption. Rating agency ICRA said half of the economic indicators it tracks saw a "deterioration" in the June quarter, partly blaming the hot weather for "dampening" mobility and travel. "These include air cargo traffic, rail freight, consumption of petrol and diesel... (and) domestic airlines' passenger traffic," ICRA said in a note this month. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to secure an outright mandate in this year's general elections, leaving it reliant on regionalist coalition parties to govern. Its two biggest allies have reportedly sought billions of dollars in financial assistance for infrastructure projects in their states. (AFP)

Australian home prices to keep rising as supply remains tight

By Devayani Sathyan
Reuters

Average home prices in Australia will rise more than 6% this year on tight supply, before moderating slightly in coming years, according to a Reuters poll of property analysts. Home prices recouped all their 2022 losses and gained more than 8% last year, suggesting the highest interest rates in 13 years barely made any dent in a consistently hot housing market, which boomed around 25% in 2020-21 when base rates were close to zero.

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) raised its benchmark cash rate from 0.10% to 4.35% in the space of about 18 months, yet the low supply of affordable housing, along with robust population growth, has prevented average house prices from falling sharply. While that may be good news for property owners, the recent rally in house prices will make it more difficult for first-time home buyers.

The RBA is not expected to reduce rates this year and is forecast to cut by just 75 basis points in 2025.

Home prices were expected to rise an average 6.3% nationally this

The RBA raised its benchmark cash rate from 0.10% to 4.35% in the space of about 18 months, yet the low supply of affordable housing, has prevented average house prices from falling sharply

year, according to the Aug 20-29 Reuters poll of 13 property market analysts, faster than the 5.3% rise predicted in a May survey. That outlook was largely driven by expectations of strong price growth in some state capitals.

"I see consistent growth in the next couple of years, but no boom. The growth will be underpinned by our very strong migration and the fact we're not building enough dwellings," said Michael Yardney, founder of Metropole, a real estate advisory firm. "Property markets are always fragmented based on local factors. But what has surprised many analysts is the strong performance of Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane. It's a combination of more people, strong wages, and up until recently, relatively cheaper properties."

Home prices in those three cities were expected to rise by 22%, 14% and 12%, respectively, in 2024. In Sydney, Australia's biggest city, prices were forecast to rise 5%; in

Melbourne, they were predicted to fall 0.4%.

At a national level, average prices are expected to rise 4.3% in 2025 and 4.5% in 2026, the poll showed.

"There's no short-term solution to fixing the Australian housing market or affordability... Owning a house will remain a luxury good for many and we think renting is probably going to increase its dominance, as it has over the last decade or so," said Johnathan McMenamin, senior economist at Barrenjoey.

"Even once we get interest rates coming off their peaks, there isn't enough housing in Australia for the population we have and we think that will continue to put upward pressure on house prices."

Relatively high mortgage rates and a short supply of affordable homes are expected to force many would-be first-time buyers to keep renting despite it eating up a relatively large proportion of their earnings.

Rents have increased nearly 40% over the past five years in Australia, according to data from CoreLogic.

Average urban home rents will rise 5-7% over the coming year, according to the median view of eight economists in the poll.



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GULF TIMES

UK reshapes its AI strategy under pressure to cut costs

Britain's Labour government is drawing up a new, cost-cutting artificial intelligence (AI) strategy ahead of a crunch autumn budget — prioritising public sector adoption of the technology over direct investment into industry.

Since taking office in July, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government has been reviewing the costs of AI. It has already scrapped a planned £1.3bn (\$1.72bn) worth of investment in related technologies — drawn up by the previous Conservative government — including an £800mn investment promised to develop a supercomputer at the University of Edinburgh.

While £1.3bn is a relatively small sum in the wider AI landscape, Starmer's government faced backlash from industry leaders who said it signals that Britain is becoming less interested in supporting innovation.

By comparison France, which is building a reputation as a European hub for generative AI, recently committed €2.5bn (\$2.77bn) to invest in developing the technology domestically.

The British government is also considering scrapping a planned San Francisco office for its AI Safety Institute, according to one source close to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The office was originally due to open over the summer, and would have seen staff hired in line with market rates, estimated at upwards of \$100,000 each.

“Labour always needs to somehow look different to the Tories, and reining in the AI safety stuff, the focus on existential risks, is an easy way to do that,” the source said.

Signalling a change of direction, tech minister Peter Kyle in July sacked one of the co-founders of the AI Safety Institute, Nitarshan Rajkumar, from his role as a senior policy adviser, according to three sources close to the DSIT.

While it is not unusual for a new administration to bring in its own advisers, some in the industry see the sacking as an unforced error. Rajkumar announced his departure from DSIT on social media platform X, but did not say his contract had been terminated.

“Huge loss to the UK civil service,” Jordan Sullivan, of lobby group Startup Coalition, wrote on X shortly after. “Just the sort of person we should be doing a huge amount to keep inside the tent.” Around the same time, Labour recruited Matt Clifford, a tech entrepreneur and chief organiser of last year's AI Safety Summit under Conservative leader Rishi Sunak, to devise a new strategy. Clifford is expected to deliver the plan in September, the source said, ahead of the government's Autumn Statement the following month.

A government spokesperson said it recognised the transformative power of AI and remained committed to harnessing the technology to deliver growth and create opportunities for people across the UK.

Tech minister Kyle aims to drive AI adoption in the public sector as a means of improving efficiency and reducing costs, while cutting back the government's direct investments into industry, according to the three sources.

Britain hosted the world's first AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park last November, drawing world leaders like Kamala Harris and tech moguls such as Elon Musk and Sam Altman.

Fears around AI's catastrophic potential spread after Microsoft-backed OpenAI released ChatGPT to the public in November 2022, but these need to be balanced against the technology's positive aspects.

The DSIT has also started fielding applications for economists to model how widespread AI will impact Britain, according to a job description seen by Reuters.

In a previously unreported meeting in Downing Street last week, Clifford hosted around 10 representatives from some of the world's biggest venture capital firms — including Index Ventures, Lightspeed Venture Partners, and Sequoia Capital — to discuss the government's AI strategy. — Reuters

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Labourers rest at a wholesale market in Kolkata on August 28, after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called for a strike in the city.

Modi's populism after election reversal puts public finances at risk

By Krishna N Das and Aftab Ahmed
New Delhi

After reverses in the general election and facing possible losses in state polls this year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's coalition has stepped up cash handouts, debt waivers and other freebies, although he has previously criticised the policy.

The handouts by state governments and promises by opposition parties trying to match the largesse threaten to upset the fiscal balance in the world's most populous nation and disrupt spending on urban infrastructure and other development projects, analysts say.

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

Maharashtra, India's richest state and ruled by a BJP coalition, has raised its fiscal deficit target to 2.6% of state GDP for the current fiscal year from 2.3% in an interim budget in February. The latest budget has listed cash handouts for women and free electricity for some farmers that could cost it about Rs960bn

(\$11.45bn) in total this fiscal year, or 2.2% of state GDP, according to research and investment firm Emkay Global.

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

Inflation, unemployment and rural distress emerged as key issues in the general election and surveys show these remain uppermost ahead of the state elections.

“Although doles are not a new phenomenon, it is the prevalence of populist promises in this cycle across the political spectrum that is worrying,” said Madhavi Arora, an economist at Emkay.

“The recent wave of populist spending across poll-bound states could upset the fine fiscal balancing act that had been playing out so far.” Opposition promises include free power to homes and monthly allowances to women.

Modi in the past has decried the practice.

“This culture of freebies is very dangerous for the development of the country,” he said in 2022.

“The people following this culture will never build new expressways, airports or defence corridors for you. They feel that they can buy the people by distributing freebies to them. Together we have to defeat this approach and remove the freebies culture from the politics of the country.”

Yashwant Deshmukh, founder of polling agency CVoter, said

politicians will increasingly resort to freebies amid widening economic disparity, especially in the absence of emotive issues like tensions with India's arch enemy Pakistan which helped the BJP in the 2019 national elections.

“The fiscal consequence of this culture is devastating, but there is a big yearning among the masses for such social welfarism,” he said.

Other analysts have said the BJP's main plank of Hindu nationalism, aimed at the country's majority, is not as effective as it has been in the past.

To be sure, the BJP has used handouts to win votes earlier too, but economists and political analysts say the party now goes head to head or even surpasses the opposition in promising such doles.

A BJP official, who did not want to be named, said the party was responding to public feedback after the general election setback and working on populism without ruining public finances.

“We will strive for the right amount of populism,” he said.

“Considering what happened in the 2024 election, we are treading very cautiously. Where we went wrong, we do collective introspection and then we act upon it.” BJP spokespersons did not respond to requests for comment or declined to comment.

Modi has taken several other populist decisions which take effect across the country.

He recently reversed a decision to reduce some tax benefits while

selling real estate after a middle-class backlash, and also rolled out a pension plan for federal government employees that will cost the exchequer about Rs62.5bn (\$745mn) this fiscal year. The government raised its share of the contribution to 18.5% of a person's basic salary from 14% earlier.

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

The brokerage firm said the deficit could further slip by up to 30 basis points. Ultimately, it said, fiscal slippage in the states would play into the federal budget.

“The Centre-State divergence with respect to spending priorities and fiscal consolidation is getting amplified, and this means consolidated fiscal deficit in India may consolidate only gradually.” Christian de Guzman, a Moody's sovereign rating analyst, told Reuters there was “not going to be a fiscal blowout by any means (but) you're not going to see very drastic improvements as well”.

“The government right now is in a weaker position to hammer home material revenue measures as compared to prior to the (general) election,” he said. — Reuters

Is it time for Greece to change its tourism model?

By Beatrice Tridimas
Thomson Reuters Foundation

As temperatures soar and tourist arrivals swell, Greece is under pressure to reimagine a tourism model that climate change is making increasingly untenable.

With its turquoise waters and reliable sunshine, Greece has long been a popular holiday destination, attracting nearly 33mn visitors last year and generating €28.5bn in revenue (\$31.7bn).

This year's total visitor numbers are expected to rise further, as global tourism sets new records from pre-pandemic levels, but the surge in holidaymakers could undermine the economic mainstay in the near future.

Anger over “overtourism” has even sparked protests in recent years on the beaches of the Cyclades, a collection of Aegean islands.

“People in Greece are getting more concerned that the (Cycladic islands) are changing very rapidly and, in a few years, what is special is going to be lost,” said Dimitris Vayanos, an economist at the London School of Economics.

Greece is not alone. Residents in other popular European destinations say visitors are harming the environment and local economies, particularly as short-term rentals from home-stay websites like Airbnb drive up housing costs and price people out of their towns and cities.

But Greece is among Europe's hardest-hit countries by global warming, and rising sea levels, scorching heatwaves, erratic rainfall and frequent wildfires are changing the landscape.

Tourism is placing an extra burden on scarce water resources and threatening fragile coastal environments, leading to calls from local authorities and the national ombudsman to regulate construction, restrict tourist flows and invest in water management and infrastructure.

The government has to balance mitigating these threats against protecting critical tourism earnings. Tourism contributes between €62.8bn euros and €75.6bn to the Greek economy, roughly a third of gross domestic product annually, according to the Hellenic Tourism Business Association (INSETE). A law in July updated regulations for tourism



agencies, guides and rentals that Tourism Minister Olga Kefalogianni has said will make the country a “global tourism power,” part of “critically important” efforts to safeguard the industry and benefit the economy.

But climate change poses existential questions for the industry.

A lengthy heatwave in June, followed by the hottest July on record, forced tourist attractions to close and caused a spate of heat-related deaths.

Wildfires, made more intense and frequent by hotter, drier weather linked to climate change, also threaten the tourism industry. A massive blaze earlier this month came within miles of the capital Athens.

Last year, more than 8,000 forest fires raged across the country, and thousands of tourists had to be evacuated from islands, including Rhodes.

“What we want to see is that tourism is sustainable or even regenerative. It has to invest in conservation of the ecosystem, and it has to assist with the cost of managing the tourists on the ground,” said Megan Epler Wood, director of the Sustainable Tourism Asset Management Program (STAMP) at Cornell University in the US.

The ombudsman, a Greek official who investigates public complaints, said in a June report the country needs to reduce construction and protect water resources and coastal areas to maintain healthy tourism.

It warned of the growing environmental risks from tourism, particularly the additional demands on water supplies for drinking, swimming pools and water parks.

A pilot study, carried out by Greek researchers and Unesco, the UN cultural agency, found that smaller islands in the Aegean Sea already need double the amount of water they can naturally produce to meet demand from tourists, which is set to increase twofold by 2030.

“The more these islands are developed, the less attractive they will be to visitors,” said Vayanos.

Greece should tailor tourism to make it more compatible with environmental standards, including the use of zoning, and concentrate development in specific areas, he said.

The introduction this year of a tourist tax, dubbed the climate resilience fee, is meant to help finance recovery from worsening forest fires and floods.

The fee for guests staying in hotels and short-term rentals is expected to generate up to €300mn in additional revenue in 2024.

But Epler Wood said that historically, tourist taxes have gone towards destination marketing rather than benefiting local communities. Research by STAMP found water, waste, energy utilities and affordable housing often did not gain at all.

The Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE) is calling for the revenue from the tax go to local government to help them manage tourists.

There is also little evidence that tourism taxes reduce arrivals, according to a report by strategy company Group NAO.

Nikos Zorzos, the mayor of Santorini, wants to cap the number of daily cruise-ship visitors at 8,000 from as many as 17,000 people.

The impact of climate change in Greece is not limited to rising temperatures and other extreme weather events.

Coastal erosion and declining seagrass meadows, which help give the Mediterranean Sea its characteristic turquoise colour, were identified in addition to floods, water shortages, high temperatures and drought as threats to tourism in an INSETE report.

“As summers will be hotter, extending the tourist season should be a priority by designing high-quality offerings to attract visitors throughout the year. Only in this way can we ensure sustainable and competitive tourism for Greece,” an INSETE spokesperson told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

‘Windfall’ fees now less likely for lawyers who sued to cut Musk’s Tesla pay

By Tom Hals
Wilmington, Delaware

The lawyers who sued successfully to void Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s \$56bn pay package are seeking a record \$6bn in fees, and the judge who will decide the amount got some unsolicited guidance this month from the state’s top court: Do not give windfalls.

Chancellor Kathaleen McCormick of Delaware’s Court of Chancery is weighing two decisions that will have a multibillion-dollar impact on Tesla and its investors. One issue is the request for the huge fee for voiding Musk’s pay. The other is whether a June vote by Tesla shareholders actually restored the pay package, in which case a large fee may not be appropriate.

McCormick got a reminder on Aug 14 from her bosses on the state’s high court in an unrelated case that big legal fees help motivate shareholder attorneys to get great results. In affirming a \$267mn fee, one of the largest ever in shareholder litigation, the justices also cautioned that at some point those type of paydays can “turn into a windfall.” Legal experts said the justices likely had the Musk case in mind.

“They are making it clear, to McCormick and anyone else, that certainly an extremely high fee, an eye-popping fee, a ‘wow’ fee, is appropriate, but there is a line where it’s simply past what is necessary to incentivise high-risk cases,” said Ann Lipton, a professor at Tulane Law School.

Fee, in Tesla stock, would amount to over \$280,000/hour

Instead of stock, lawyers would accept \$1bn cash

Judge might still decide to restore Musk’s pay package



Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

The case over Musk’s compensation began in 2018 when shareholder Richard Tornetta sued Tesla’s directors for approving Musk’s pay package, which granted the billionaire CEO stock options as the electric carmaker hit various goals. Musk did not get a guaranteed salary and the options soared in value as the stock rose 10 fold.

In January, McCormick sided with Tornetta, finding Musk controlled the pay negotiations. She called the \$56bn compensation “unfathomable” and decided it should be rescinded.

The shareholder lawyers at Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann and Friedman Oster & Teitel, both of New York, and Andrews & Springer of Wilmington, Delaware, have worked without pay since they filed the case, with the understanding they would get



A Tesla Cybertruck charges at a Supercharger in Palm Springs, California.

part of the recovery. The case was brought to benefit Tesla, so the company is going to pay the fee.

The firms asked McCormick in March to approve a “conservative” fee of 11% of the stock that Musk would have gotten if he had won the case. The request works out to 29mn shares, worth almost \$6bn at Wednesday’s closing price of \$205.75. Alternatively, they said they would take a cash fee of \$1bn.

If the amount of the fee request was unprecedented, Tornetta’s attorneys said, it was because they won arguably the largest judgment in US history. They noted that Delaware courts reward higher percentages of a judgment or settlement when attorneys battled deep into a case. They said precedent supported a fee request of as much as 33%.

Delaware judges also look at the time and effort of the lawyers as a way to spot a potential

windfall. By this measure, the size of the fee request by Tornetta’s lawyers is stunning.

Their fee equals more than \$280,000 an hour for each of the 19,500 hours worked on the case by every attorney, associate and paralegal.

The highest-paid attorneys on the case normally bill \$1,150 an hour while on the low end some contract attorneys and paralegals charge \$250 an hour, according

to court filings. The Delaware Supreme Court has approved huge hourly rates before.

In 2012, the court affirmed the largest fee in its history, around \$304mn to attorneys who obtained a \$2bn judgment for Southern Copper Corp. The fee worked out to about \$35,000 an hour.

By comparison, the highest-paid corporate attorneys, who bill by the hour and get paid regardless of outcome, can make around \$2,500 an hour.

The Delaware Supreme Court did not specify when fees become windfalls, but did say \$5,000 an hour was “at the high end.” That would suggest Tesla is on the hook for a fee of around \$100mn, just 10% of the requested cash fee.

Lipton noted there are several factors that suggest the Tornetta attorneys should expect more.

For example, they worked unpaid for six years, overcame challenging legal hurdles, risked taking the case to trial and won a complete victory.

However, if McCormick decides that Musk’s pay package was restored by the shareholder vote, Tesla should not be on the hook for a large legal fee, John Reed, an attorney for the company, told McCormick at a July hearing.

“You asked if Elon Musk was overpaid,” Reed said, referring to McCormick’s question at the start of her January ruling. “We want to ask if the plaintiff’s lawyers are being overpaid.” – Reuters

In Ecuador’s Amazon, scant progress after landmark oil vote

- **Scant progress halting drilling despite key vote**
- **End to oil in Yasuni rainforest to take years**
- **Indigenous people excluded from government commission**

By Anastasia Moloney
Bogota

A year after Ecuador voted in a historic referendum to ban all oil drilling in a unique part of the Amazon rainforest, Indigenous leaders say the government has been slow to shut down wells in the oil-dependent South American nation.

On Aug 20, 2023, more than 10mn people – almost 60% – voted to keep crude in the ground in the Yasuni national park in the Amazon.

The referendum was hailed by environmentalists and Indigenous communities as a landmark victory to protect one of the world’s most biodiverse regions and a rare example of the world shifting away from a fossil-fuel based economy.

Since the Amazon rainforest absorbs vast amounts of carbon dioxide, it is key in shaping the Earth’s climate and is a vital weapon to slow climate change.

The vote called on the state oil firm, Petroecuador, to dismantle and shut operations at its Yasuni ‘43-ITT’ oil block in a “progressive and orderly” and then restore the area.

Ecuador’s constitutional court ruled last year that Petroecuador had one year to remove infrastructure at the block.

But oil is still being pumped in an area that produces some 58,000 barrels a day, and all the fulsome government pledges to act have yielded little progress, Indigenous leaders said.

“It’s very worrying. The machinery is still there, so where’s the commitment from the government?” said Nemonte Nenquimo, a leader of the Waorani Indigenous people, whose ancestral lands lie in the Yasuni rainforest.

“It’s been a year, and the government hasn’t complied,” Nenquimo told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The government is at pains to show it is stepping up its efforts to withdraw from all oil activity in the zone and said “its commitment to honour the (referendum) decision remains firm,” according to an Aug 20 government statement.

The Energy Ministry said it had closed one of the 247 wells in the block earlier this week, part of a phase-out plan expected to take around five-and-a-half years.

Ecuador’s Energy Minister Fernando Santos has estimated dismantling operations would cost \$600mn.

“The government is making a mockery of the public referendum by saying the process is complex and costly and could now take between three to five years,” said Fernando Munoz, a spokesperson for Yasunidos, an Ecuadorian environmental group, which began pushing for the referendum a decade ago.

“We understand that it’s not possible to shut the key and stop oil production overnight, but there’s no timetable for a gradual and orderly shutdown,” he said.

The wells should all go offline by December 2029, the government has said, but removing all the infrastructure at the block could take until August 2030.

Ecuador produces about 500,000 barrels of crude a day, and oil revenue – vital to its stretched government – makes up nearly 3% of the country’s gross domestic product.

Plans to shutter oil production could be hampered by urgent security challenges facing President Daniel Noboa, who in January declared Ecuador was at war with criminal gangs.

Noboa has also floated the idea of postponing the closure, citing the need to fund his crackdown on drug-fuelled gang violence.

“As the country faces economic and security crises, the oil industry and its supporters in government have been pushing

hard to disregard the popular vote,” said Mitch Anderson, co-founder of advocacy group Amazon Frontlines.

UN experts have also backed calls for action on the referendum result, urging the Ecuadorian government to “urgently implement the will of the people.”

“Ecuador should prioritise protecting the climate, the environment and Indigenous Peoples who depend on it and shift away from an economic model based on depleting natural resources and fossil fuel extraction,” a group of UN experts said in a statement on Aug. 20.

Preserving the Amazon, the world’s largest tropical rainforest, is vital to curbing runaway climate change.

Scientists say climate change, deforestation and fires are all helping push the Amazon to a “tipping point” that threatens to alter the forest irreparably.

Indigenous groups have campaigned for decades to keep oil companies out of their home so as to protect local nature, along with several communities who live there in voluntary isolation.

They say Indigenous communities have not benefited from oil and that building roads and rigs has led to deforestation and environmental damage, be it oil spills or air pollution.

“Yasuni is a territory of great biodiversity. What happens here affects the climate change crisis and the planet,” said Ene Nenquimo, vice-president of the Waorani Nation of Ecuador, one of several Indigenous organisations demanding action.

In May, the government set up a ministerial commission to oversee the closure; the panel includes Petroecuador, but Indigenous people were given no seat at the table.

“As owners of the land, the government should ask us Waorani what happens on our land,” Ene Nenquimo said.

But Ecuador relies on crude exports to prop up its economy. Petroecuador has said ending exploration in Yasuni would cost Ecuador some \$13.8bn over two decades and cut 12% of the country’s 480,000 barrels per day (bpd) oil production.

Losses from oil revenue could be partly offset by comprehensive tax reform, “based on the principle that those who earn more should pay more tax,” said Munoz, the academic.

“There should be an open public debate about the need to carry out a just transition and how to sustain an economy without oil as reserves run dry,” he added.

Indigenous organisations are considering taking the issue to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to ensure the government complies with the referendum result.

“We’ll not sit with our arms crossed,” said Ene Nenquimo. – Thomson Reuters Foundation



A view of the Amazon rainforest at Yasuni National Park in the Pastaza province, in Ecuador.



FILE PHOTO: A pipeline of state-owned Petroecuador is pictured as Ecuador vote called on the state oil firm, Petroecuador, to dismantle and shut operations at its Yasuni 43-ITT oil block.

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

- **Assets in US money markets hit \$6.24tn in August**
- **Investors’ dedication to cash could be tested by faster or deeper Fed rate cuts**
- **Cash remains popular with individual investors despite potential for higher returns elsewhere**

By Suzanne McGee
Reuters

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

Assets in US money markets hit a record \$6.24tn this month, data from the Investment Company Institute showed on Aug 21, even as markets became increasingly confident that the Fed was gearing up to lower rates at its Sept 17-18 meeting. Those reductions are expected to eventually pull yields in money markets down from above 5%, a rate unimaginable a few years ago.

So far, however, there is little evidence that individual investors are abandoning cash to chase returns in stocks and bonds. Some \$100bn flowed into money markets in August, according to data analysis firm EPFR.

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

Money-market yields went from near-zero to “4.5%, 4.7%, and now we’re over 5.2%. I can live with 4.5% again,” he said. The durability of money markets is a recent example of how cash has reemerged as an asset class that can compete with stocks and bonds, one of the most striking shifts in the post-Covid investment landscape. Assets in money markets have grown by \$313bn this year, according to Crane Data, which tracks money market funds, despite heady returns in stocks and expectations that the Fed will cut rates.

Cash is seen as one of the safest and most liquid asset classes, boosting its appeal to retirees and investors looking to get paid while staying on the sidelines. Though yields are expected to fall in coming months, projections show them stopping well short of the near-zero levels of a few years ago, when hedge fund legend Ray Dalio famously declared cash “trash”.

Clients are also hanging onto cash because of worries about rich stock valuations following an 18% year-to-date rally that has taken the S&P 500 to record highs, as well as uncertainty ahead of the US presidential election, wealth advisors said.

But investors holding too much cash could miss out on the often superior returns of other asset classes. Cash has returned an average of 2% in the 12 months after the Fed starts cutting interest rates, while stocks have returned 11% and

Treasury bonds gained 5%, according to a study by Hartford Funds of rate-cutting cycles since 1928. Anne Marie Stonich, chief wealth strategist at Coldstream Wealth Management in Seattle, has been urging clients to move out of cash and into assets such as government bonds, where they can lock in yields if they hold the securities to term. Her efforts have met resistance from cash-loving investors, she said.

“It’s easy to have been complacent, but now it’s time to wake up and pay attention to moving your cash onward,” Stonich said. Investors’ dedication to cash could be tested if a weakening economy prompts the Fed to cut rates faster or deeper than expected. Such a scenario could conversely raise the appeal of haven assets if growth worries prompt a stock selloff. Traders will be watching US employment data on Sept 6 to see if the labour-market weakness that roiled markets in late July and early August has dissipated.

Futures tied to the Fed’s main policy rate show markets pricing about two percentage points in rate cuts over the next year.

The latest inflows into money-market funds included money from institutional investors seeking to lock in yields ahead of Fed cuts, EPFR’s data showed.

Yet cash is also popular with individual investors, who have accounted for more than \$4tn of the funds currently in money markets, according to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. A tiny part of that cash pile belongs to Judith Astroff, a 75-year-old systems analyst in New York, who estimates 15% of her \$500,000 retirement account is sitting in money markets. Astroff is no stranger to risk. Much of her account came from a windfall trade on shares of chipmaker Nvidia, one of the big winners from the market’s excitement over artificial intelligence.

However, she prefers cash to the volatility of stocks or locking up money in longer-term US government bonds.

“I really should take some of that money and put it somewhere that I would have a better chance of seeing some growth,” she said. But “after a phenomenal run of luck with Nvidia, I’m kind of terrified about buying anything else.” Brian Nick, head of portfolio strategy at NewEdge Wealth in Stamford, Connecticut, hopes to persuade clients to diversify if yields fall as expected in coming months.

“You have to convince them there’s a reason to move away from money markets but also a reason why some other asset offers a better opportunity,” he said. “That will be the approach that eventually wins out.”

Turkish victory, army day celebrated in Doha

The Turkish embassy in Doha marked the Turkish Victory Day and Armed Forces Day, commemorating the 102nd anniversary of the victory in the Turkish War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Under the patronage of the Turkish ambassador to Qatar, Dr Mustafa Goksu, the event on Thursday saw the attendance of several distinguished figures, including Qatari Amiri Naval Forces deputy commander Major-General Abdullah Ali al-Mazrouei, head of the International Co-operation Authority at the Qatar Armed Forces Brigadier-General Abdulaziz Saleh al-Sulaiti, and Brigadier-General Yousef al-Dosari from the Qatari Air Force.

The ceremony was also attended by Qatari military officers, a number of diplomats and Turkish military officers and members of the Turkish community living in the country.

In his address, the Turkish envoy expressed his pride and gratitude in celebrating this historical occasion.

“This day represents a crucial moment in our nation’s history,” said Dr Goksu. “It is not merely a military victory, but the revival of the Turkish nation and the foundation of the Republic.”

“Let us take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices of those who came before us, to remember Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his comrades with respect, and to pray for all the martyrs and veterans who sacrificed their lives in service to our country,” the envoy said.

The embassy’s military attaché, Colonel Ali Cetin, gave a speech at the occasion appreciating the significance of the historic day.

During the event, a message from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was read out.

He was quoted as saying: “This day is one of the turning points in our history,

a victory achieved through the valour of our martyrs and the sacrifices of our people, which continue to light our way to this day.”

He further stressed that Türkiye is doing its utmost and mobilising all resources to halt conflicts, injustice, and massacres around the world, particularly in Gaza.

He confirmed that Türkiye will always remain a source of inspiration for oppressed peoples and will continue to strive for peace and justice globally.



Mobile library ignites reading passion at ‘Back to School’ drive



By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

A mobile library bus, stocked with more than 150 books from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), has become a highlight of Msheireb Galleria’s “Back to School” campaign, drawing 150-200 young readers daily since its launch on August 25.

This initiative, organised by MoEHE in collaboration with Mowasalat (Karwa), Msheireb Properties, and Me Visual Company, aims to prepare students for the upcoming academic year (2024-25) through a mix of educational and recreational activities.

“Participants are required to read books, and we’ve also included LED screens and other educational resources,” Me Visual Company project manager Mostafa Sawda told *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the event. “The bus also offers storytelling sessions and other interactive activities, which are popular to children.”

Despite the intense summer heat, he said the mobile library has

The mobile bus library forms part of the MoEHE’s broader ‘Checklist’ competition. **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar



The MoEHE’s “Back to School” campaign, especially its mobile bus library, attracts a large number of children since its launch on August 25. Located in front of Msheireb Galleria, the bus helps in raising awareness on the importance of reading.

seen a “very positive response”, with a large number of children visiting daily from 4pm-10pm.

The bus is part of the broader “Checklist” competition, which includes stages such as The Stage, Arts and Crafts, The Classroom, Workshops, Reading Corner, Donation Station, Stationery and Retail, and Canteen.

Sawda underscored the campaign’s success in fostering a growing interest in reading among young people.

He cited the diverse nationalities

of the children who visit, making the bus a “melting pot of cultures”.

In addition to offering a variety of books, he said the bus provides interactive activities, including areas for drawing and painting.

The campaign also features activities aimed at evoking old school memories, such as a classroom displaying vintage school books, tools, pictures, and films.

“You have to go inside the bus and read at least one book to get a stamp and complete the checklist,” Sawda explained. “We are giving

vouchers to kids who complete the checklist.”

He added that the “Back to School” campaign stirred a passion for reading among children, creating a positive and interactive environment that encourages learning and cultural exchange.

The campaign, themed *My School, My Second Home* and scheduled to conclude today (August 31), invites parents and students to engage and take part in a number of educational and fun-filled activities.



QPO new season to begin with Strauss concert

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) is set to inaugurate the new season with “An Evening with R. Strauss: Death, Drama, & Discovery” on September 13 at 7.30pm at the Qatar National Convention Centre’s auditorium 3.

The programme showcases three of Strauss’s most compelling tone poems, a statement said.

The concert begins with *Death and*

Transfiguration, which delves into themes of mortality and spiritual elevation.

Next, *Macbeth* vividly portrays Shakespeare’s tragic protagonist through Strauss’s masterful musical narrative.

The evening will culminate with *Aus Italien*, a lively musical depiction inspired by Strauss’s youthful travels in Italy, under the baton of the energetic conductor Elias Grandy.