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Kuwait posts KD 1.6bn deficit

Sharp drop in oil income • Wages, subsidies account for 81% of spending

NEWS IN BRIEF

EPA contains oil spill

KUWAIT: The Environmental Public Authority (EPA) announced Wednesday it contained an oil spill near Ras Al-Julaia, activating a national plan to combat marine oil pollution. The spill, reported by the interior ministry, was located six kilometers off the coast. The EPA coordinated with the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) to use satellite imagery to assess the spill's extent. Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) managed to prevent the spill from reaching vital coastal installations. The source of the spill remains unknown, and further investigation will be conducted. The Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) confirmed the spill was not due to their operations but is assisting in containment efforts. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Oil slick seen near Ras Al-Julaia. — KUNA

Kuwait reaffirms workers' rights

KUWAIT: Kuwait said Wednesday it is committed to preserving and protecting foreign workers' rights and eliminating human trafficking and smuggling. Aseel Al-Mazyad, spokesperson of the Public Authority for Manpower, marking World Day against Trafficking in Persons, coinciding July 30, said in a press release that the authority is dedicated to ensuring workers receive full rights while combating human trafficking and smuggling in coordination with other concerned agencies. — KUNA (See Page 4)

July 22 breaks heat record

PARIS: Earth withered through a second-straight day of record-breaking temperatures on July 22, the EU's climate monitor said Wednesday, as parts of the world suffer devastating heatwaves and wildfires. Preliminary data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) showed the daily global average temperature was 17.15 degrees Celsius on Monday, the warmest day in recorded history. This was 0.06C hotter than the day before on July 21, which itself broke by a small margin the all-time high temperature set only a year before. — AFP

Starlink activated at Gaza hospital

DUBAI: SpaceX Chief Executive Elon Musk said his Starlink satellite Internet service has been activated in a hospital in Gaza, where many medical facilities have been destroyed by the war, with the help of the UAE and the Zionist entity. UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan thanked the billionaire entrepreneur for supporting the UAE field hospital in Gaza, where many medical facilities have been demolished and medicines are scarce. — Reuters

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait public finances have returned to the red after posting a budget deficit of KD 1.6 billion in the fiscal year 2023/2024 which ended on March 31, the finance ministry said on Wednesday. The shortfall was posted as a result of a 19.4 percent drop in oil income to KD 21.5 billion over the previous fiscal year's KD 26.7 billion, which led total revenues to slide by 17.9 percent to KD 23.6 billion, the ministry said in a statement received by Kuwait Times. Non-oil income rose 1.3 percent but remained a non-factor at just KD 2.1 billion.

But the result is not a major disappointment, as Kuwait had projected a deficit of KD 6.8 billion in

the budget at the start of the fiscal year. But the deficit comes a year after Kuwait posted its first surplus after eight consecutive years in the red. Finance Minister Anwar Al-Mudhaf said last week that the state paid a total of KD 33 billion for budget shortfalls in the past nine years. That reduced the assets of the State Reserve Fund to just KD 2 billion, the minister said.

Total spending in the 2023/2024 fiscal year hit KD 25.2 billion, compared to KD 22.4 billion in the previous year, a rise of 12.7 percent, the ministry said. Wages and subsidies accounted for KD 20.4 billion, as much as 81 percent of total spending, while capital expenditure came in at KD 1.86 billion, a meagre 8.0 percent of spending, the ministry said.

Average price of Kuwaiti crude throughout the year was at \$84.36 a barrel, compared to \$97 a barrel last year, and average oil production was at 2.65 million barrels per day, almost the same as the previous year. The ministry recalled that public revenues do not include revenues from the Future Generations Fund, the country's sovereign wealth fund.

The fund's current assets are estimated by the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute at just below \$1 trillion, a historical record high. The institute said on Tuesday that Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund added \$177 billion in the past year to hit \$980 billion. Since March, the fund has added \$56 billion. The figures have not been officially confirmed as the figures are kept confidential.

Gulf Bank records KD 28.2m net profit for first half of 2024

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank KSCP announced its financial results for the first half ending June 30, 2024. The bank reported a net profit of KD 28.2 million, a decline of KD 7.6 million or 21.3 percent compared to 2023 first half net profit of KD 35.8 million. In addition, Gulf Bank recorded an operating income of KD 96.9 million for the first half of 2024, representing an increase of 5 percent compared to the same period of last year. Moreover, operating profit before provisions and impairments increased to KD 52.6 million, representing a healthy growth of 6.6 percent compared to the first half of 2023.

Commenting on the results, Gulf Bank Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said: "For the second quarter of the year 2024, Gulf Bank consistently exhibits robust



Gulf Bank Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi



Gulf Bank Acting CEO Waleed Khaled Mandani

operational performance, reinforced by strong top-line growth and sound financial position metrics. We faced higher than usual credit costs which resulted in a decline in our net profit growth during the first half of the year compared to the same period of last year, however, we remain confident in the Bank's future potential."

Following the completion of phase II of the new core banking system during the first half of 2024,

Gulf Bank Acting CEO Waleed Khaled Mandani commented: "We are pleased to announce the successful completion of Phase II of our core banking system, a significant milestone in our journey towards advancing customer centricity. This achievement strengthens our operational capabilities and reaffirms our focus to meet the evolving needs of our clients in a digitally driven era." (See Page 8)



KATHMANDU: Army personnel and other officials stand around the debris of a Saurya Airlines plane after it crashed during takeoff at Tribhuvan International Airport on July 24, 2024. — AFP

Nepal plane crash kills 18, pilot survives

KATHMANDU: A passenger plane crashed on take-off in Kathmandu on Wednesday, with the pilot rescued from the wreckage but all 18 others aboard killed, police in the Nepali capital told AFP. Nepal has a woeful track record on aviation safety and the Himalayan republic has seen a spate of deadly light plane and helicopter crashes over the decades.

The Saurya Airlines flight was carrying two crew and 17 of the company's staff members, Nepali police spokesman Dan Bahadur Karki said. "The pilot has been rescued and is being treated," he said. "Eighteen bodies have been recovered, including one foreigner. We are in the process of taking them for post-mortem." The Civil Aviation Authority said the dead foreigner was a Yemeni engineer.

A news release from the airport said the aircraft "veered off to the right and crashed on the east side of the runway" shortly after take-off. The survivor was in serious condition in hospital, it said. Ram Kumar K C, who runs a tyre store near the crash site, told AFP the plane caught fire after hitting the ground. "We were about to run to the site but then there was an explosion so we ran away again," the 48-year-old said.

Nepal's Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli visited the crash site and asked people to "be patient" in a social media post, without elaborating. An emergency cabinet meeting was called to form a panel to investigate the incident, a government spokesman said.

The flight was being conducted for either technical or maintenance purposes, Gyanendra Bhul of Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority told AFP, without giving further details. Images of the aftermath shared by Nepal's military showed the plane's fuselage split apart and burnt to a husk. Around a dozen soldiers in camouflage gear stood on top of the wreckage, the surrounding earth coated in fire retardant.

Continued on Page 6

Energetic Harris attacks Trump in electrifying rally

MILWAUKEE: An exuberant Kamala Harris whipped up a rapturous crowd Tuesday at her first rally since effectively clinching the Democratic presidential nomination, as she launched fresh attacks on Donald Trump for trying to "take the country backward". In a stark contrast to outgoing President Joe Biden's often stumbling and low-energy speeches, Vice President Harris gave a punchy and enthusiastic address that was greeted with cheers at the event in the battleground state of Wisconsin.

Harris, 59, is injecting fresh hope into the Democratic party, following 81-year-old Biden's stunning exit from the race after a disastrous debate with Trump fueled fears about his age and mental competency. "Donald Trump wants to take our country backward," Harris told the crowd in Milwaukee. "Do we want to live in a country of freedom, compassion and rule of law, or a country of chaos, fear and hate?"

Continued on Page 6



MILWAUKEE: US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks at West Allis Central High School during her first presidential campaign rally on July 23, 2024. — AFP



Innovation Nation summer camp empowers tech-passionate youths

In partnership between Zain, SACGC and in collaboration with Assima Mall



Sessions covered digital skills, AR, robotics, coding and electronics.



The IN Camp booth at Assima Mall.

KUWAIT: The second edition of the Innovation Nation (IN) summer camp concluded successfully, engaging over 1,600 young tech enthusiasts. This initiative, a strategic partnership between Zain and Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) - a KFAS center, and in collaboration with Assima Mall, aimed to enhance tech skills and inspire digital innovation. The camp, which was aimed at 7-14 year olds, featured 126 engaging workshops and hands-on sessions from July 15-21. It was widely received by parents, children, and youth who took the opportunity to learn new tech skills that inspired their passion for technology.

The IN Camp covered a variety of topics related to new technologies, like digital doodling and 3D printing, augmented reality (AR), robotics and programming, electronics, mechanical and software engineering and more. The workshops were facili-

tated by experts and certified trainers from Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity. The content was presented in an innovative and engaging manner that appealed to young people.

The workshops were organized and supervised by members of Zain's FUN program and SACGC's Talmatha initiative, both of which provide university students with a real-world, part-time work experience, fostering skills like project management, public relations, customer service, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. This partnership between Zain, SACGC, and Assima Mall is part of the broader Innovation Nation initiative, which encompasses all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs. The initiative focuses on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and primarily targets young people and entrepreneurs, aiming to foster a digitally capable generation.



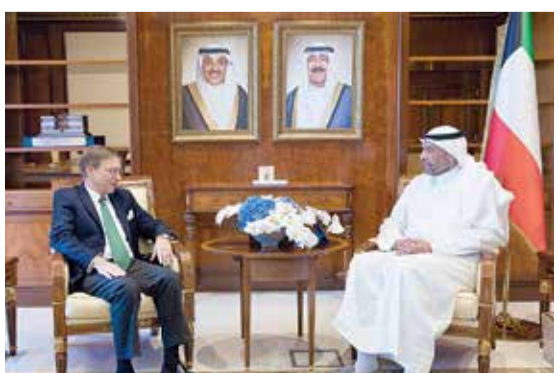
126 engaging workshops held for 7-14 year olds throughout a week.

Kuwait, Libya, Sudan discuss developing ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah on Wednesday discussed with ambassadors of Sudan and Libya on means of enhancing relations and developing joint work with friendly countries. A statement by Chief of the General Staff said that Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef separately received Ambassadors of Libya and Sudan. They discussed issues of mutual concern and the recent regional and international developments, it said. — KUNA



FM and German envoy hold talks



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on Wednesday received the German Ambassador to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz. Discussions about the countries' friendly relationship were highlighted in the meeting as well as means to strengthen and enhance them. — KUNA



Officials pose for a group photo following the 6th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between Kuwait and India on Wednesday.

Kuwait, India hold 6th foreign office consultations

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait and India held the 6th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) on Wednesday in Kuwait in which both sides reviewed the entire gamut of multifaceted bilateral relations to further strengthen and diversify them. The 6th FOC between Kuwait and India were co-chaired by Assistant Foreign Minister (Asia) Ambassador Sameeh Essah Johar Hayat and India's Joint Secretary (Gulf) Aseem Mahajan. Both sides undertook a comprehensive review of bilateral relationship and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest during the consultations.

Expressing satisfaction with the traditionally strong bilateral ties, both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in various areas, including political ties, regular high-level exchanges, trade and investment, education, technology, health, culture and people-to-people contacts, a press release issued by the Indian Embassy said.

Mahajan, who arrived in Kuwait heading an Indian delegation to participate in the consultations, called on



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives India's Joint Secretary (Gulf) Aseem Mahajan on Wednesday.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday. They discussed avenues and new initiatives to further deepen the India-Kuwait partnership.

Earlier on Wednesday, Mahajan called on Ministry of Commerce Undersecretary Ziyad Al-Najem and discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral trade and investment cooperation including further boosting trade, diversifying the trade basket, deepening energy cooperation and new initiatives in technology and fintech domains.

The visiting Indian official also had a bilater-

al meeting with Tahani Rashid Al-Naseer, Assistant Foreign Minister (Legal), Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both sides reviewed the progress of bilateral agreements and discussions on ongoing negotiations of various agreements and MoUs for early finalization, the release further said. The timely convening of the FOC as a sequel to the previous meeting in May 2023 is expected to impart further momentum in bilateral relations. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the consultations. The next round of consultations will be held in New Delhi at a mutually convenient time, according to the release.

AC advice: Traveling? Adjust, don't turn off!

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: As air conditioners become more crucial during Kuwait's summers, serving as our only savior from heat, engineer and AC expert Omar Alkhalifah, has highlighted common mistakes in their usage. He also shared tips on optimizing ACs' efficiency, extending their lifespan, and minimizing their environmental impact.



Omar Alkhalifah

Set at 26 or 27 degrees

One most common mistake that Khalifah pointed out is travelling for vacation and leaving the AC at its regular temperature, even though no one is at home to enjoy the cool air. Yet, he equally warned against completely turning it off, pointing out that this could result in issues such as mold and mildew growth, warping of wood or paper, damage to furniture, and potential harm to delicate electronics. Instead,

he recommended setting it to 26 or 27 degrees, and leaving it on fan, which he called the "economic mode." This setting maintains a comfortable yet efficient level of cooling that protects the house from damage while also reducing electricity consumption.

Don't use water heaters

Working in the Ministry of Electricity and Water in Kuwait, Khalifah made another observation during summer: electricity demand peaks not only due to cooling systems but also because people keep their water heaters on, adding strain to the electricity grid. He advised turning off water heaters, questioning the logic of keeping the AC at 18 degrees while also running water heaters during the hot season.

Use a summer blanket

He also cautioned against being careless with AC usage, specifically addressing those who use thick winter blankets in summer and keep the AC at its lowest temperature. These seemingly small actions shouldn't be ignored, as they lead people to unknowingly consume more electricity.

Central ACs vs individual AC units

For those looking to buy environmentally friendly AC units, Khalifah recommended opting for inverter air conditioners despite their higher cost, as they consume less power than conventional models. When comparing central ACs versus individual AC units, Khalifah preferred central systems for their



efficiency in cooling entire homes with a single unit.

Expel the superheated air

Regarding car ACs, Khalifah offered bonus tips on maximizing efficiency. When parking under the sun, he advised against immediately turning on the AC. Instead, he suggested briefly rolling down the windows to expel the superheated air before switching on the AC. The purpose is to prevent the AC from working hard to cool down trapped hot air. He also recommended leaving an open glass bottle of water in the car. As the water evaporates slowly due to the heat inside the vehicle, it absorbs heat from the surrounding air, including the interior of the car. This gradual evaporation can create a slight cooling effect, helping to make the inside feel a bit less hot.

Local

Concerned bodies urged to protect digital infrastructure, develop electronic systems

63 contracts signed to purchase medicines, medical supplies

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet on Tuesday urged concerned bodies to develop its electronic systems and applications to raise their efficiency and protect the state's digital infrastructure. Led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace, the Cabinet watched a presentation by Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communication Affairs Omar Al-Omar about the recent global IT disruption.

Minister Al-Omar assured other Cabinet members that Kuwait dealt immediately with that incident as concerned bodies took some measures, topped with opening an operation room, a hotline to receive local complaints, and channels for communications with global service providers. Sharida Abdullah Al-Maousherji, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, said after the meeting.

Al-Omar noted that government applications and electronic systems have not been affected by that global glitch, due to continued efforts made by the government in enhancing its electronic systems and infrastructure. "We are paying much attention to information security and electronic infrastructure protection," he said. In this regard, the Cabinet highly appreciated the big efforts made by the minister and the staff of Kuwait IT and cyber watchdogs.

In addition, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah briefed the ministers about the

outcomes of the second international Baghdad conference on combating drugs. The minister further informed the ministers about the gist of his meetings, on the sidelines of the conference, with Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani and some senior officials, on means of enhancing bilateral ties in a manner that serves the supreme interests of the two countries.

Furthermore, Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi apprised the Cabinet of the signing of 63 contracts valued at KD 47 million to purchase medicines and medical supplies. This comes in line with the ministry's eagerness to boost the medical sector and ensure the availability of all medicines and medical supplies, the minister stressed. The Cabinet watched a presentation by Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, and Acting Minister of Oil Anwar Al-Mudhaf on the final financial statements of the government financial departments for FY 2023-2024, which posted a deficit of KD 1.56 billion (\$5.1 billion). The Cabinet stressed the need to boost the cooperation of all the state's bodies with the Ministry of Finance to stop any waste of public funds and increase non-oil revenues. The Cabinet approved the drafts regarding the final financial statements of independent and attached institutions for FY 2023-2024 and referred them to His Highness the Amir. Finally, the Cabinet reviewed the expectation pace of the 2024 tourist projects and thanked the Touristic Enterprises Company for its sincere efforts to develop and implement these projects. — KUNA



Seif Palace

Govt issues tasks manifesto, advises speedy execution

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti government has issued 35 resolutions and instructions since May 19 in line with guidelines by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah that have drawn the task map for the near future. The Cabinet decisions cover a host of issues at diverse levels, including four main files: development, financial and economic reforms, nationality, and combating corruption.

At the development level, the Cabinet began with endorsing a draft decree of forming the board of the central apparatus for public tenders, guided by instructions to double efforts, facilitate procedures, and speed up the endorsement of key ventures, as outlined in the government manifesto. The government has tasked relevant authorities to accelerate establishment and operation of Mubarak Al-Kabir Mina (port), stressed on the necessity of speedy work-out of accords with China, ahead of submission to the ministerial economic affairs commission to prepare a report in this respect.

Moreover, the Cabinet directed relevant apparatuses to speed up the pace of the tasks to accomplish vital ventures, namely the railroad in Kuwait, the development of the structural plan of Al-Sulaybikhat port, and face lifting the seaside region in Al-Jahra. Additionally, it has decided to form a commission to draw up the government task manifesto and asked it to set priorities and timetables.

At the investment level, instructions had been issued to the Public Investment Authority and other concerned authorities to intensify efforts to multiply domestic businesses and create jobs for the youth. As to the citizenship file, it had agreed during consecutive meetings to a number of minutes by the supreme commission for acquiring citizenship, addressing various cases where a number of people had been stripped of their Kuwaiti nationality, lost their citizenship, or obtained it by deception, counterfeiting, or other illegal means.

While issuing stiff instructions to maintain justice, combat corruption, and bolster the overseeing apparatuses, the government had taken legal measures to strip farmers who used plots of land for illegal purposes. Along with the same approach, the Cabinet tasked the ministers, departments' officials, and government apparatuses to execute recommendations included in the annual report of the government performance follow-up apparatus for 2023 and submit reports to the apparatus every three months.

To stem excessive expenditures, the council of ministers has tasked the Ministry of Finance to pinpoint the avenues of funds' misappropriations and set the measures that need to be taken to tackle it in tandem with the government directions, while stressing that it is imperative to coordinate with the Audit Bureau for safeguarding the public funds. In another vein, the government has asked the Ministry of Health to coordinate with other public departments to carry out the national health survey.

The government had arranged joint meetings aimed at boosting cooperation among ministries and affiliate entities as part of the approach to accelerate accomplishments and adopt flexible policies for sake of tangible accomplishments. Furthermore, the Cabinet has adopted the "open door policy," setting specific hours to receive ordinary citizens and advising officials to communicate closer with the nationals.

Among the concrete initial accomplishments was the November declaration about the availability of 15,000 jobs, declaring tenders for road overhaul, speeding up the digital transformation, and steps for addressing energy issues and challenges. "There is a huge volume of development enterprises on the path," declared His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on May 28, affirming the top-level policy to accomplish ventures and put the wheels on the development track to move forward at the highest level of speed as possible. — KUNA

Kuwait reaffirms commitment to global peace, disarmament

VIENNA: Kuwait has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting peace, security, and stability as well as nuclear weapons non-proliferation worldwide. This came in a speech, addressed by Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations and International Organizations Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons held in Geneva.

Ambassador Al-Hayen stated that peace, security, and stability in the world cannot be achieved with the proliferation of weapons, especially nuclear arms, as he stressed the necessity to strive to rid humanity of such weapons so as to harness materials for progress and development. He affirmed that the multilateral framework, objectives, principles, and commitments agreed upon in international agreements provide the most appropriate and optimal approach to address all international security issues, urging us to seize the opportunity of this meeting to achieve positive outcomes.

Kuwait, he continued, reaffirmed the importance of implementing commitments towards achieving the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as called for respecting the balance between the treaty's three pillars and rectifying imbalances caused by some parties. The

ambassador highlighted the significance of enhancing joint efforts to achieve effective outcomes during the upcoming review conference, urging all to participate with a focus on success rather than failure.

He also addressed all the efforts by Arab states towards establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 546 of the 73rd session. Kuwait welcomed any new initiatives to establish zones free of nuclear weapons and mass destruction arms. Ambassador Al-Hayen reiterated the significance of implementing General Assembly resolution 1995 and establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

Kuwait welcomed the success of the conference as it called for all conference participants to engage in negotiating a comprehensive and binding treaty in this regard to enhance regional and international security. Ambassador Al-Hayen pointed out that while Kuwait affirmed the right of all states to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it warned against the danger of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction proliferation amid today's challenges and tensions in our world.

Moreover, in his speech, Ambassador Al-Hayen said Kuwait believes that in order to achieve a secure world free from nuclear weapons, it begins with the full adoption by the international community of the key disarmament treaties and agreements, which would eliminate regional and international tensions. He condemned ongoing aggression in the Gaza Strip and the repeated threats to use nuclear weapons against a state party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Kuwait, the senior diplomat noted further, called for a serious stance from the international community in general



Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations and International Organizations Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen

and treaty parties in particular, urging concerted efforts and cooperation to halt such blatant violations of international laws, treaties, and agreements.

He expressed hope that the second preparatory committee meetings in Geneva would reinforce everyone's conviction of the necessity for continued constructive dialogue aimed at sustaining security and stability, taking necessary and serious steps to enhance confidence and reduce the risks of nuclear proliferation. Kuwait called on all treaty parties to fulfill their responsibilities in the best means possible to ensure the success of the 2026 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, ultimately aiming to preserve international security, peace, and stability through nuclear disarmament. — KUNA

Where do attachment styles come from?

By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: In an effort to delve deeper into the dynamics of marital relationships, particularly within Arab societies, Kuwait Times conducted an interview with Psychologist and Relationship Consultant, Amer Al-Shawaf. The focus was on understanding how attachment styles, shaped by personal experiences, societal expectations, and emotional intelligence, influence relationship dynamics and strategies for fostering healthier bonds.

Al-Shawaf highlighted that in Arab cultures, marital expectations are often rigidly defined by personal experiences, resembling guiding principles for couples. The belief persists that adhering to specific behavioral norms is essential for maintaining marital control.

However, deviations from these norms may prompt individuals to seek solutions outside the relationship, contributing to relationship strain.

Regarding attachment styles, Al-Shawaf noted, "It became evident that both men and women in these relationships seek to fulfill perceived deficiencies. When these needs are unmet within the relationship, some individuals may seek external sources for satisfaction and fulfillment." This underscores how attachment styles - formed by early childhood experiences - shape relational dynamics, influencing behaviors and emotional responses within marriages.

Al-Shawaf emphasized the importance of understanding deep-seated needs and their connection to childhood experiences. "By identifying these roots, it becomes possible to reframe behaviors and cultivate healthier relational patterns," he explained. This approach underscores the role of emotional intelligence and self-awareness in navigating complex emotional landscapes within marriages.

Al-Shawaf explored how avoidantly and anxiously attached partners interact in relationships. He noted a common perception where women are often seen as nagging or complaining - anxiously attached, while

husbands may dismiss or ignore their wives' concerns to stay emotionally composed - avoidantly attached. These behaviors, however, go against principles of emotional intelligence that emphasize empathy, understanding, and effective emotional management in relationships.

Over time, such emotional complexities can create distance and reinforce damaging stereotypes. Therefore, understanding attachment styles offers valuable insights into relational dynamics within marriages. It provides a framework for developing interventions that promote empathy, emotional regulation, and healthier relationship patterns. By addressing attachment-related needs and fostering emotional intelligence, couples can cultivate stronger, more fulfilling relationships.



Amer Al-Shawaf



Kuwait and UAE Guards strengthen cooperation

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Refaie and the UAE National Guard delega-

tion on Wednesday explored ways to strengthen cooperation in fields of common interests. KNG said in a press release that Al-Refaie received UAE's delegation, headed by Deputy Commander of the National Guard Brigadier General Ahmad Al-Zaabi. Al-Refaie conveyed greetings of KNG Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and his deputy Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, stressing the importance of these visits in consolidating military cooperation between the two countries. — KUNA



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New news channel a 'qualitative leap' for Kuwait media

KUWAIT: The head of the local affairs department and government spokesman, Amer Al-Ajmi, said on Wednesday that the launch of the new news channel on July 28 represents a qualitative leap and a pioneering step for Kuwaiti media. Al-Ajmi confirmed that the launch of the new news channel embodies the lofty directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and under the close follow-up of the Prime Minister HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and ambitious visions of the Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi.

This announcement is also evidence of the government's deep commitment to upgrading the level of national media and enhancing its status at the regional and international levels. He explained that these joint efforts "aim to provide a qualitative and professional media that contributes to enhancing awareness and knowledge among members of Kuwaiti society, pointing out that the new channel will work according to the highest standards of professionalism based on the accumulated experience of the Kuwaiti official media and its great experiences that laid the foundations of a sustainable and experienced media work." — KUNA

FM receives Czech envoy's credentials



KUWAIT: The Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya on Wednesday received the credentials of the new Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Kuwait Juraj Chmiel, during a meeting on Wednesday at the Ministry's headquarters. Al-Yahya wished the new ambassador success in his duties and expressed hope for further progress in the strong bilateral relations between the two countries. — KUNA

Kuwait promotes human rights and transparency

Gulf state committed to preserving and protecting foreign workers' rights



Officials and participants take a group photo after the Foreign Ministry's meeting with civil society organizations. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait is dedicated to advancing and safeguarding human rights, affirmed Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duaij Al-Sabah. In a statement made to KUNA following a meeting organized by the ministry with civil society organizations, Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah highlighted Kuwait's efforts to collaborate with key stakeholders and bolster transparency and community engagement in human rights initiatives.

The session included representatives from various government agencies and civil society groups, underscoring Kuwait's commitment to international human rights standards. Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah stated that the meeting reflected Kuwait's dedication to integrating civil society into the national report preparation process for human rights. She emphasized the importance of exchanging ideas and constructive proposals to achieve common goals.

The gathering focused on preparing Kuwait's fourth periodic report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR4) and the second national periodic report for the Arab Charter on Human Rights. Civil society representatives commended the meeting and expressed their readiness to fully cooperate with the national committee in preparing and following up on human rights recommendations.

They reviewed humanitarian activities and discussed how to best reflect these efforts in national reports. The meeting is part of a series of consultations by the national committee to ensure the creation of comprehensive and transparent reports that highlight Kuwait's national efforts and commitment to implementing international recommendations on human rights.

Foreign workers' rights

In another development Kuwait said Wednesday it is committed to preserving and protecting foreign workers' rights, and to eliminating hu-



man trafficking and smuggling. Aseel Al-Mazyad, spokesperson of the Public Authority for Manpower affirmed; marking the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, coinciding July 30, said in a press release that the Authority is dedicated to ensuring workers receive full rights while combating human trafficking and smuggling in coordination with other concerned agencies.

Al-Mazyad noted that the Authority, in cooperation with Kuwait Trade Union Federation, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Permanent National Committee for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons will organize an event at the Avenues Mall on July 30th from 10:00 am until 10:00 pm to raise awareness on the matter. — KUNA



Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duaij Al-Sabah

Ninth annual Dates Festival promotes local production



DOHA: The Qatari famous Souq Waqif on Wednesday launched its ninth annual Dates Festival with the aim to enhance efforts to promote local date production. More than 100 farmers participate in the 12-day festival that is located at the eastern yard of Souq Waqif. The festival witnesses significant demand from citizens, residents and visitors for dates and its various types at attractive prices. — KUNA



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N Korean sweet wrappers, noodles litter Seoul streets

India's strategic railway bridge closes gap to Kashmir

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MANILA: People walk along a flooded street in Manila on July 24, 2024 amid heavy rains brought by Typhoon Gaemi. — AFP

Gaemi turns Philippine streets into rivers

Death toll from heavy rains rises to at least 14 over last 2 weeks

MANILA: Relentless rain drenched the northern Philippines on Wednesday, triggering floods in Manila and deadly landslides as Typhoon Gaemi intensified the seasonal monsoon. Rescuers were deployed across the densely populated capital to help evacuate people from low-lying homes after downpours turned streets into rivers, trapping vehicles.

People clutched flimsy umbrellas as they waded through thigh-deep murky water or used small boats and shopping trolleys to move around. "The disturbance it caused is great. The waters reached the second floor of our house," Nora Clet, a resident, told AFP.

Restaurant employee Rex Morano said he was not able to work due to the "very high" floodwaters. A state of calamity was declared for Manila,

unlocking funds for relief efforts, after the state weather forecaster warned of "serious flooding" in some areas.

Government offices were shut and classes suspended, more than 100 domestic and international flights were cancelled, and tens of thousands of customers lost power because of the weather. Some shopping malls and churches offered temporary shelter to people affected.

"Many areas are flooded so we have rescuers deployed all over the city. There is an overwhelming number of people asking for help," Peachy de Leon, a disaster official in suburban Manila, told AFP. "We were told last night the rain will not hit us, then the rain suddenly poured so we were quite shocked. There is an ongoing search and rescue now."

Typhoon Gaemi, which has swept

past the Philippines as it heads towards Taiwan, intensified the southwest monsoon rains typical for this time of year, the state weather forecaster said. "Usually the peak of rainy season is July and August and it so happens that there is a typhoon in the eastern waters of the Philippines that enhances the southwest monsoon," senior weather specialist Glaiza Escullar told AFP.

More than 200 millimeters (nearly eight inches) of rain fell in the capital in the 24 hours to Wednesday morning, Escullar said, which was "not unusual". More heavy rain was expected on Thursday. Landslides killed a pregnant woman and three children in Batangas province, south of Manila, and a woman and her five-year-old child in Pampanga province, north of the capital, police and disaster officials said

Wednesday. Three major roads were blocked by landslides in the mountainous Benguet province.

That takes the death toll from heavy rains over swaths of the country in the past two weeks to at least 14, as tens of thousands sheltered in evacuation centers. President Ferdinand Marcos ordered on Wednesday disaster response officials to ensure they had sufficient stockpiles of food for the hardest-hit areas because "their situation is critical".

Hard-scrabble neighborhoods near Manila Bay were badly affected, with most of the streets underwater and more than 2,000 people forced to flee their homes. About 20 big storms and typhoons hit the Philippines or its surrounding waters each year, damaging homes and infrastructure and killing dozens of people. — AFP



HAMBURG: Police officers are seen in front of the "Blue Mosque", housing the Islamic Centre of Hamburg on July 24, 2024. — AFP

Germany bans Islamic association, mosques over alleged Iran links

BERLIN: Germany on Wednesday banned the Hamburg Islamic Centre, an association that has been under investigation for several months over its alleged support for Lebanon's Hezbollah group and its links to Iran. Tehran reacted in fury, summoning Germany's ambassador to Iran to condemn Berlin's "hostile action" which it branded as a "clear example of Islamophobia".

Germany's Interior Ministry accused the center of presenting itself as a purely religious organization with no political agenda, but said its probe has found the contrary to be true. In a statement, the ministry said that it "banned the Hamburg Islamic Centre and its affiliated organizations throughout Germany to date, as it is an Islamist extremist organization pursuing anti-constitutional objectives".

Investigators raided 53 properties allegedly linked to the center across Germany on Wednesday, and the ban will also be imposed on several organizations related to the Hamburg center - including four Shiite mosques. "I want to make it very clear: We are not taking action against a religion," said Interior Minister Nancy Faeser. "We are drawing a clear distinction between the Islamist extremists that we are cracking down on and the many Muslims who belong to our country and live according to their faith. This ban absolutely does not apply to the peaceful practice of the Shiite religion," she stressed.

Accusing the group of being a "direct representative of Iran's supreme leader", the ministry said the center spreads Tehran's ideology "in an aggressive and militant manner". It is allegedly seeking to "establish authoritarian, theocratic rule" in place of a democracy, said the ministry, accusing the center of backing the "military and political dimension" of organizations like Hezbollah. It is also believed to propagate anti-Semitism, something that Germany has been battling to stem amid a jump in cases following the Zionist entity's nine-month war in Gaza, launched in response to a deadly attack led by Hamas militants on Zionist soil. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Pro-Palestine demonstrators protest near the US Capitol before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a joint meeting of Congress on July 24, 2024, in Washington, DC. — AFP photos

Thousands protest Netanyahu outside US Capitol

WASHINGTON: Thousands gathered in Washington on Wednesday to protest Benjamin Netanyahu and call for a ceasefire in Gaza, as the Zionist premier prepared to address the US Congress. Crowds carrying Palestinian flags and signs ranging from left-wing slogans to Bible verses gathered outside the Capitol calling for a ceasefire and the arrest of Netanyahu, as prosecutors seek a warrant for him at the International Criminal Court. "The hypocrisy

of our (US) politicians today has gone beyond any limits," Mo, a 58-year-old protester, told AFP.

Protesters gathered Wednesday were calling for a ceasefire while also criticizing Netanyahu's appearance in the United States. "Seek peace and pursue it," read one sign, quoting a Bible verse, while others were designed as criminal "wanted" signs, with photos of Netanyahu in place of a mugshot. "Arrest that war criminal," read another.

"We are horrified by the destruction of the health system in Gaza," Karamah Kummerle, of the organization Doctors Against Genocide, told AFP. "And we are here to show our opposition to having the criminal Netanyahu come to our capital and being greeted by the politicians who sent him weapons to kill children in Gaza," the doctor, who traveled to Washington from Boston, said. — AFP



International

India's strategic railway bridge closes gap to Kashmir

Bridge to revolutionize logistics in Ladakh, the icy region bordering China: Retired general

REASI, India: Soaring high across a gorge in the rugged Himalayas, a newly finished bridge will soon help India entrench control of disputed Kashmir and meet a rising strategic threat from China. The Chenab Rail Bridge, the highest of its kind in the world, has been hailed as a feat of engineering linking the restive Kashmir valley to the vast Indian plains by train for the first time.

But its completion has sparked concern among some in a territory with a long history of opposing Indian rule, already home to a permanent garrison of more than 500,000 soldiers. India's military brass say the strategic benefits of the bridge to New Delhi cannot be understated. "The train to Kashmir will be pivotal in peace and in wartime," General Deependra Singh Hooda, a retired former chief of India's northern military command, told AFP.

Muslim-majority Kashmir is at the center of a bitter rivalry between India and Pakistan, divided between them since independence from British rule in 1947, and the nuclear-armed neighbors have fought wars over it. Rebel groups have also waged a 35-year-long insurgency demanding independence for the territory or its merger with Pakistan.

The new bridge "will facilitate the movement of army personnel coming and going in larger numbers than was previously possible", said Noor Ahmad Baba, a politics professor at the Central University of Kashmir. But, as well as soldiers, the bridge will "facilitate movement" of ordinary people and goods, he told AFP.

That has prompted unease among some in Kashmir who believe easier access will bring a surge of outsiders coming to buy land and settle. Previously tight rules on land ownership were lifted after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government cancelled Kashmir's partial autonomy in 2019. "If the intent is to browbeat the Kashmiri consciousness of

its linguistic, cultural and intellectual identity, or to put muscular nationalism on display, the impact will be negative," historian Sidiq Wahid told AFP.

'Biggest military logistics exercise'

India Railways calls the \$24 million bridge "arguably the biggest civil engineering challenge faced by any railway project in India in recent history". It is hoped to boost economic development and trade, cutting the cost of moving goods. But Hooda, the retired general, said the bridge's most important consequence would be revolutionizing logistics in Ladakh, the icy region bordering China.

India and China, the world's two most populous nations, are intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia, and their 3,500-kilometre (2,200-mile) shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension. Their troops clashed in 2020, killing at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, and forces from both sides today face off across contested high-altitude borderlands. "Everything from a needle to the biggest military equipment ... has to be sent by road and stocked up in Ladakh for six months every year before the roads close for winter," Hooda told AFP. Now all that can be transported by train, easing what Indian military experts call the "world's biggest military logistics exercise" — supplying Ladakh through snowbound passes. The project will buttress several other road tunnel projects under way that will connect Kashmir and Ladakh, not far from India's frontiers with China and Pakistan.

'Holy book'

The 1,315-meter-long steel and concrete bridge connects two mountains with an arch 359 meters above the cool waters of the Chenab River. Trains are ready to run and only await an expected ribbon cutting



JAMMU: This photograph taken on July 6, 2024, shows a general view of Chenab bridge, the world's highest rail arch bridge in Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir. — AFP

from Modi. The 272-kilometer railway begins in the garrison city of Udhampur, headquarters of the army's northern command, and runs through the region's capital Srinagar.

It terminates a kilometer higher in altitude in Baramulla, a gateway trade town near the Line of Control with Pakistan. When the road is open, it is twice the distance and takes a day of driving. The railway cost an estimated \$3.9 billion and has been an immense

undertaking, with construction beginning nearly three decades ago.

While several road and pipeline bridges are higher, Guinness World Records confirmed that Chenab trumps the previous highest railway bridge, the Najiehe bridge in China. Describing India's new bridge as a "marvel", its deputy chief designer RR Mallick, said the experience of designing and building it "has become a holy book for our engineers". — AFP

Search goes on after Ethiopia landslides kill 229

ADDIS ABABA: Crowds gathered around a mud pit containing dead bodies as rescuers pressed on with a desperate search on Wednesday for survivors of devastating landslides in an isolated area of southern Ethiopia that have killed 229 people and affected thousands more. Humanitarian agencies were scrambling to rush emergency relief aid to the stricken community after the deadliest such incident recorded in Ethiopia, a country highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

About 14,000 affected people — including children and pregnant women — need to be evacuated urgently because of the risk of further landslides in the remote and mountainous area, a UN source told AFP. "Search and rescue operations are still ongoing and are being beefed up," the source said.

Images broadcast on regional state television from the site in Kencho Shacha Gozdi, a locality in the state of South Ethiopia, showed local residents using shovels to dig through vast mounds of mud. In one graphic scene, dozens of men surrounded a pit where human limbs were exposed in the mud, while others carried bodies on makeshift stretchers.

In a nearby tent, women wailed as they sat near a row of bodies wrapped in mainly white shrouds. So far, 148 men and 81 women are confirmed to have died, the Gofa Zone Communications Affairs Department which covers the locality, said Tuesday, but there are fears the toll could rise. Senait Solomon, head of communications for the South Ethiopia regional government, said eight people had been rescued and taken to medical facilities for treatment.

The number of people still missing from Monday's disaster is not known, but Senait told AFP that updated tolls might be issued later Wednesday. She said the landslide site was sloped and "prone to disasters", adding that conservation work to protect the area, including tree planting, had been ongoing at the time of the calamity.

Drones aid search

Firaol Bekele, early warning director at the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) told AFP the search was being aided by drones operated by experts from the country's intelligence and cybersecurity agency. "The government is addressing urgent needs for food, water,



KENCHO: This grab made from a footage released by SRTA on July 24, 2024, shows people digging in search of victims at the bottom of a landslide that occurred in Kencho, in the Geze-Gofa district on July 22, 2024. — AFP

medicine and shelter," he added. Officials have said that most of the victims were buried after they rushed to help after the first landslide, which followed heavy rains on Sunday in the area roughly 450 kilometres (270 miles) from the capital Addis Ababa — about a 10-hour drive. The UN source told AFP that about 125 people had been displaced, and that 14,000 needed to be evacuated fast because of the risk of further landslides, including 5,000 pregnant or lactating women and 1,300 children.

More than 21 million people or about 18 percent of the population rely on humanitarian aid in Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, as a result of conflict and natural disasters such as flooding and drought.

'Deeply saddened'

"I am deeply saddened by this terrible loss," Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had said on X on Tuesday. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is Ethiopian, sent a message of condolence on X and said a WHO team

was being deployed to support immediate health needs. Condolences were also sent from the African Union and the US embassy in Addis Ababa, as well as neighboring Djibouti. Firaol of the EDRMC had told AFP on Tuesday that residents had tried to save lives after four households were initially affected by a mudslide. "But they too perished when the landslide engulfed them," he said.

The UN's humanitarian response agency OCHA said Tuesday that a similar, but lower-scale landslide had occurred in May in the same area, killing more than 50 people. Seasonal rains in South Ethiopia state between April and early May had caused flooding, mass displacement and damage to livelihoods and infrastructure, it had said in May.

In 2017, at least 113 people died when a mountain of garbage collapsed in a dump in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The deadliest landslide in Africa was in Sierra Leone's capital in Freetown in August 2017, when 1,141 people perished. Mudslides in the Mount Elgon region of eastern Uganda killed more than 350 people in Feb 2010. — AFP

Paris drug dealers say they're ready for Olympics too

PARIS: France has declared itself prepared for the deluge of Olympics visitors — and so have Paris's drug dealers. The dealers have promised a steady supply of wares, but warned prices may go up and delivery wait times too under the weight of tens of thousands of security forces and heavy demand.

From Parisians renting out their apartments, to a transit system that has boosted its ticket prices, everyone is looking to make a buck during the Games — and that includes the underworld. "We're always ready in this business," a Parisian dealer told AFP, echoing French leader Emmanuel Macron's judgment this week that his nation is all set for the Games. "There will always be somebody ready, that's how it is when there's money to be made," said the dealer, on condition of anonymity. With up to 45,000 security forces patrolling the streets, experts expect delivery services will see a bump in clients seeking to avoid getting busted.

In fact, France has already had a boom in messaging app and social media-driven drug deliveries since pandemic lockdowns pushed the trade off the street and onto smartphone screens. At the same time, the country has voiced increasing alarm over a flourishing drug trade and deadly violence between rival gangs. "There is a kind of Uberization of drug trafficking, with the development of digital offerings on applications like Telegram, or promotional deals," said criminal attorney Adrien Gabeaud.

In the run-up to the Games, dealers have been updating their clients on feeds with what to expect during the competition that opens Friday and runs through August 11. "The prices of our services will be adjusted due to challenging road traffic conditions and heavy demand," one seller wrote to customers. Swathes of central Paris are blocked off during the festivities, snarling car and pedestrian traffic enough that the Parisian dealer said it wouldn't be worth the trouble, even to see the events.

In one exchange between a seller and customer, seen by AFP, the dealer warns that transactions cannot happen in the open. "The police are on the lookout," the message read. Yet other dealers are sending out messages to assure clients, like one that wrote: "I inform you that despite the Olympics, the delivery service will remain the same." — AFP

Energetic Harris attacks Trump ...

Continued from page 1

Where Biden used to target Trump as a broad threat to democracy, Harris took a more personal, targeted approach by pointing to her record as a California prosecutor who had dealt with what she said were "predators" and "fraudsters" like the former president and convicted felon. "So hear me when I say I know Donald Trump's type," she said, echoing comments she made to campaign workers on Monday. "I will proudly put my record against his any day of the week."

Harris notably focused on abortion, accusing Trump of trying to ban the procedure and saying that "we trust women to make decisions about their own bodies and not have their government tell them what to do". The pumped-up crowd repeatedly

chanted "Kam-a-la" during her speech in Milwaukee, the same city where Trump was crowned Republican nominee at his party's conference just last week.

Trump's campaign has been thrown into turmoil after the Biden departure, which now makes him the oldest ever US presidential candidate. But Trump insisted that Harris would be "easier" to beat in November than her boss. Trump, who survived an assassination attempt on July 13, also told reporters he would "absolutely" take part in at least one presidential debate with Harris.

Harris — who is the first female, black and South Asian "veep" in US history and aiming to become the country's first woman president — took just 36 hours to secure enough delegates to be nominated after Biden's withdrawal. Top Democratic congressional chiefs — Senator Chuck Schumer and House minority leader Hakeem Jeffries — threw their weight behind her in a press conference Tuesday. Hollywood star George Clooney — who made waves earlier this month as one of the first high-profile

Democratic activists to urge Biden to drop his reelection bid — also backed her.

Biden meanwhile returned to the White House after nearly a week in isolation with Covid at his Delaware beach house, during which he made his shock exit announcement. Biden announced he will deliver a primetime speech from the Oval Office on Wednesday about "what lies ahead". Asked by reporters what he would say as he arrived back, Biden replied: "Watch and listen. Why don't you wait and hear what I say?"

Biden's doctor said he was now all clear of COVID. Both he and Harris are due to meet Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week when he visits Washington. Harris's official nomination should now come by Aug 7 in an online vote of delegates nearly two weeks before the celebratory Democratic convention in Chicago. Support continued to pour in with the United Steelworkers Union and philanthropist Melinda French Gates, the ex-wife of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, both endorsing. — AFP

Nepal plane crash kills 18...

Continued from page 1

Dozens of grieving relatives gathered later outside a nearby hospital where the bodies were transported from the crash scene. "I am heartbroken," Rajan Acharya, the brother of a safety officer aboard the flight, told AFP. "He was my brother, but even more than that, we were best friends." The plane was scheduled to fly on Nepal's busiest air route between Kathmandu and Pokhara, an important tourism hub. Saurya Airlines exclusively flies Bombardier CRJ 200 jets, according to its website.

Nepal's air industry has boomed in recent years, carrying goods and people between hard-to-reach areas as well as foreign trekkers and climbers. But it has been plagued by poor safety

due to insufficient training and maintenance, issues compounded by mountainous Nepal's treacherous geography. The European Union has banned all Nepali carriers from its airspace over safety concerns.

Nepal has some of the world's trickiest runways on which to land, flanked by snow-capped peaks with approaches that pose a challenge even for accomplished pilots. The weather can also change quickly in the mountains, creating treacherous flying conditions. Nepal's last major incident involving a commercial flight was in January 2023, when a Yeti Airlines service crashed while landing at Pokhara, killing all 72 aboard. That was Nepal's deadliest since 1992, when all 167 people aboard a Pakistan International Airlines plane were killed when it crashed on approach to Kathmandu airport. A Thai Airways aircraft crashed near the same airport earlier that year, killing 113 people. — Agencies

International

N Korean sweet wrappers, noodles litter Seoul streets

Trash balloons hit South Korea's presidential compound in first

SEOUL: North Korean sweet wrappers and packets of crackers made at a factory once visited by leader Kim Jong Un were seen by AFP reporters on streets in the South Korean capital Wednesday. The nuclear-armed North has sent thousands of balloons carrying bags of trash southwards since May, in a tit-for-tat propaganda war between the two Koreas, with Seoul blasting K-pop and anti-regime messages from loudspeakers along the border in return.

South Korea's military warned of a fresh batch of balloons early Tuesday, including several that hit the president's downtown compound, and AFP reporters in Seoul found piles of apparent North Korean garbage on the streets later that day.

The balloons are typically cleared up quickly by South Korean authorities, but a small portion of one balloon's payload appeared to have been left behind. "It's not right. It's inhumane," 72-year-old Joo Jung-rin told AFP, pointing to the garbage. Another woman in her seventies who declined to give her name said "It's all very scary".

Pyongyang has described its balloon blitz as retaliation for anti-regime propaganda balloons sent northwards by activists in the South. But Joo said the activists were sending "medicine and rice" to the North. Activists have told AFP that they sent paracetamol during the COVID pandemic, along with US dollars. "I don't think it is right that they are sending trash," in return she said, postulating that it was "revenge" for the South's economic success.

President gets share

Trash balloons sent by North Korea hit the South Korean presidential compound Wednesday, security officials told AFP, prompting Seoul to mobilize chemical response teams in the escalating tit-for-tat propaganda war.

It is the first time the South Korean leader's office in downtown Seoul, which is protected by scores of soldiers and a no-fly zone, has been directly hit by any of the thousands of trash-carrying balloons launched by Pyongyang since May.

According to the Yonhap news agency, the presidential office had been monitoring the balloon in real time, and was aware of exactly where it would land. "It is difficult to handle midair because we do not know what the balloons may contain," a presidential official said, Yonhap reported. "There will be no change in our policy of collecting them after they have fallen." The military has refrained from shooting down the balloons out of concern their contents could spread further and cause more damage, Yonhap said.

Soap and noodles

AFP identified the wrappers of fruit jellies with manufacturing information that indicated they had been produced in Potonggang District in Pyongyang. There were also packages from strawberry castella cakes and sesame seed crackers which listed their production factory as the "Chungryoo corn processing plant".

Kim visited the factory in 2015 after its establishment, saying it would be the "standardized model factory in the food industry". The trash also included instant noodle packets and wrappers of powdered soap made at the "Bonghwa soap factory" — with the description on the wrapper claiming it was an "energy-saving" soap due to it using less water.

"Bonghwa soap" is reportedly a popular soap brand in North Korea, and, according to state media, late leader Kim Jong Il once inspected the soap factory, personally testing the soap to see if it lathered properly. The state-run Korean Central News



SEOUL: A pedestrian walks along a pavement past pieces of North Korean food packaging, sweet wrappers and paper suspected to be from trash balloons sent from North Korea, in Seoul on July 24, 2024. — AFP

Agency said this showed "the great general's infinite love" for the people.

The trash "looks like a payload of unused but recently produced labels — probably from various factories or a label printing company — in North Korea," said Chad O'Carroll, head of Seoul-based specialist site NK News. "Compared to the scrap papers seen in other payloads, in this case

it looks like relatively high-end packing material from some premium North Korean consumer goods lines," he told AFP.

It is possible this kind of trash could have been included in the balloons with "some intent to show South Koreans that there is modern and sophisticated consumer product availability," in the North, he added. — AFP

Oil leaks, toxic emissions as Zionist strike worsens Yemen pollution: NGOs

DUBAI: The Zionist strike on Yemen's port of Hodeida has released hazardous emissions and caused fuel spills, experts said, compounding environmental pollution already worsened by oil spills from Houthi ship attacks.

The strikes on Saturday, the first claimed by the Zionist entity on Yemen, hit fuel storage tanks in the main port under the control of the Iran-backed rebels, triggering an inferno. Parts of the port were still ablaze early on Wednesday, after an oil tank exploded overnight, according to local authorities. Images from the harbor showed a thick plume of black smoke billowing into the air.

The Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS), a UK charity that monitors the environmental impact of conflict, said: "The fire and associated spills will have generated hazardous emissions to the air and substantial ground contamination with pollution to the marine environment likely." Yemen was already suffering from serious air and water pollution, a report published by the UN's migration office in March warned, after nearly a decade of war between the Iran-backed Houthis and the internationally recognized government propped up by Saudi Arabia.

The attack, which the Zionist entity said was in retaliation for the first fatal Houthi strike on Tel Aviv, resulted in "a large oil spill from the burning fuel tanks into the sea," said Mwana for Human Rights, a Yemeni rights group which dispatched an assessment team to the dock. This "could cause significant environmental pol-

lution in the marine environment as the leak is still ongoing," the group said in a statement to AFP, warning that its impact could be "widespread due to the large quantities of fuel that were stored."

'Localized spills'

Wim Zwijnenburg of Dutch peace-building group PAX reported at least tens of thousands of liters of oil burning in the aftermath of the attack, warning that the "noxious fumes" posed serious health risks. Analyzing recent satellite imagery captured by the European Space Agency's Sentinel-2, he said the Zionist strikes caused "localized spills into the harbor marine environment and on the premises" and destroyed most of the port's oil storage capacity. "Faced with conflict and climate crisis impacts, civilians and the environment in Yemen are bearing the brunt of ongoing hostilities," Zwijnenburg told AFP.

Yemen's waters are home to a rich marine ecosystem, including coral reefs, while many coastal communities in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country are reliant on fishing. Farah Al-Hattab of Greenpeace Middle East said coastal pollution from the strikes on the Hodeida port "potentially affects millions of people whose livelihood depends on fishing."

"Fishing was Yemen's second largest export and it continues to provide a source of income and food security," she told AFP. A spate of drone and missile strikes by the Houthis on vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since November, linked to the



HODEIDA: Oil tanks are seen in the port of Yemen's Houthi-held city of Hodeida on July 2, 2024 (top). Burning oil tanks (bottom) in the same port on July 21, 2024, a day after Zionist strikes. — AFP

Gaza war, have turned Yemen's waters into a hotspot for pollution.

Last week, a Liberia-flagged oil tanker was apparently leaking fuel in the Red Sea after it was hit by a Houthi strike 97 nautical miles northwest of Hodeida, according to NGOs

and maritime security agencies. A large oil slick, initially measuring 220 kilometers (135 miles) long, was spotted near the site of the strike, threatening the Farasan marine sanctuary off the coast of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, according to CEOBS. — AFP

Egyptian authorities make sweeping arrests after calls for protests

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have extended the pretrial detention of at least 125 people and arrested two journalists shortly before holding a national dialogue on Tuesday to discuss pretrial detention policies, rights lawyers and groups say. Most of those detained were swept up in a wave of arrests following calls for protests on July 12 over economic conditions under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, they said. Although there were no protests, dozens were arrested from their homes and held on accusations including spreading false news, using social media platforms to promote terrorist ideas, and belonging to a terrorist organization, rights lawyer Nabih El-Genady said.

On Sunday and Monday the public prosecution extended their detention for 15 days, he and another rights lawyer, Khalid Ali, said. The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, a rights group, confirmed that at least 125 people were being held. Authorities have also arrested two journalists in the past week, one a cartoonist for independent news outlet Al-Manassa missing since plain-clothed officers raided his house on Monday, the other a reporter for the Arabic Post new website, said Ali.

Rights groups have long criticized the extensive use of pretrial detention to keep people jailed for years. They say it should be a last resort, not standard procedure. Egypt's State Information Service said recommendations on pretrial detention from Tuesday's meetings under a national political dialogue launched in April 2022 would be sent to Sisi.

It said calls for protest were issued by members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, describing this as "another desperate attempt by the terrorist group to sow discord within the nation". Former army chief Sisi came to power after leading the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Mursi, the country's first democratically elected leader, amid protests in 2013. Over the past decade he has overseen a wide crackdown on dissent that has swept up liberals and leftists as well as Islamists. — Reuters

NATO finds gaping holes in defenses of Europe

BRUSSELS: The war in Ukraine and the looming US presidential election dominated a NATO summit in Washington this month but, away from the public stage, the alliance's military planners have been focused on assessing the enormous cost of fixing Europe's creaking defenses. NATO leaders agreed plans last year for the biggest overhaul in three decades of its defense capabilities, amid growing fears of Russian aggression. Behind the scenes, officials have since been poring over the minimum defense requirements to achieve those plans, which were sent to national governments in recent weeks, according to one military planner, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The minimum requirements detail the shortfalls in NATO armies in key areas, providing a rough indication of how many billions of euros it could cost to fix, the military planner said. NATO aims to convert these requirements into binding targets for individual governments to provide for the defense of Europe by autumn 2025, when it holds a regular meeting of defense ministers. Reuters spoke to 12 military and civilian officials in Europe about the classified plans, who outlined six areas the 32-nation alliance has identified as the most pressing to address.

These include shortages in air defenses and long-

range missiles, troop numbers, ammunition, logistical headaches and a lack of secure digital communications on the battlefield, the conversations with NATO officials showed. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss security matters more freely. NATO hasn't publicly given an estimate of the overall costs.

The findings show NATO faces a slog to achieve its goals at a time when its unity could be tested by budgetary constraints among senior European members, and differences over how hawkish its stance on Russia should be. Crucially, this year's US presidential election has raised the specter that NATO's preeminent power may be led by a man critical of the alliance — former President Donald Trump — who has accused European partners of taking advantage of US military support.

At the July 9-11 Washington summit, some European policymakers publicly acknowledged that, regardless of who wins November's election, the continent will need to hike its military spending. "We need to recognize that for America, whatever the result of the presidential election, the priority is increasingly going to shift to the Indo-Pacific, so that the European nations in NATO must do more of the heavy lifting," British Defence Secretary John Healey said on the sidelines of the summit.

In response to Reuters' questions, a NATO official said the alliance's leaders had agreed in Washington that in many cases expenditure beyond 2 percent of GDP would be needed to remedy shortfalls. He noted that 23 members now meet the 2 percent minimum requirement, or exceed it. "Regardless of

the outcome of the US elections, European Allies will need to continue to increase their defense capabilities, forces' readiness and ammunition stocks," the NATO official said.

NATO is at its highest alert stage since the Cold War, with its more pessimistic officials, including German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, warning that an attack by Russia on its borders could happen within five years. While the Russian economy is already on a war footing, European governments may face resistance if they demand more money for defense spending from taxpayers reeling from a cost-of-living squeeze to prepare for a war that seems a distant prospect to many, analysts say. "We may expect to see a political backlash materialize, especially if politicians try to explain away cuts elsewhere with increased defense budgets," Eurointelligence, a news and analysis service focused on the EU, said in a July 12 note.

Heavy lifting

NATO's first serious overhaul since the end of the Cold War will pivot the alliance back to the defense of Europe against a possible Russian attack, after years of more distant missions in the likes of Afghanistan. Reuters has previously reported that NATO planners believe it will need between 35 and 50 extra brigades to withstand a Russian attack. A brigade consists of 3,000 to 7,000 troops, which would mean anywhere from 105,000 to 350,000 soldiers.

It means, for example, that Germany would need 3-5 extra brigades or 20,000 to 30,000 additional combat troops, the source said, effectively one more

division on top of the three divisions Berlin is working to equip at the moment. The defense ministry in Berlin declined to comment on classified plans.

Echoing US officials, many European policymakers — including Britain's Healey — are already saying that defense spending will have to top the alliance's current target of 2 percent of GDP.

Tuuli Duneton, undersecretary for defense policy in Estonia — one of Europe's most hawkish governments — suggested in an online briefing on July 2 ahead of the Washington gathering that next year's NATO summit should discuss raising the spending goal to either 2.5 percent or 3 percent.

The US is by far the largest contributor to NATO operations. According to NATO estimates published in June, the United States will spend \$967.7 billion on defense in 2024, roughly 10 times as much as Germany, the second-largest spending country, with \$97.7 billion. Total NATO military expenditures for 2024 are estimated at \$1,474.4 billion. Trump's selection in July of Senator JD Vance as his vice-presidential running partner — who opposes aid to Ukraine and has criticized NATO partners as "welfare clients" — stirred concern in some European capitals.

Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Dietz, a Pentagon spokesperson, said the US supported European allies' efforts to increasing defense spending to at least the 2 percent of GDP target, and noted they had already made significant progress in boosting budgets.

"NATO's regional defense plans involve enhancing readiness and flexibility across the Alliance. We remain committed to contributing significantly to these efforts," said Dietz. — Reuters

THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2024

Gulf Bank records KD 28.2 million in net profit for first half of 2024

Al-Kharafi: Bank consistently exhibits robust operational performance



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi
Gulf Bank Chairman

- Gulf Bank consistently exhibits robust operational performance, reinforced by strong top-line growth and sound financial position metrics.
- Despite the higher than usual credit costs, we remain confident in the Bank's future potential.
- The significant loan book expansion during the first half reflects the success of our strategic initiatives in meeting our clients' evolving needs.
- The enhancement in operational profitability highlights our focus on growth and financial discipline, reflecting our dedication on expanding strategically and maintaining fiscal stability.



Waleed Khaled Mandani
Gulf Bank Acting CEO

- The successful completion of Phase II of our core banking system is a significant milestone in our journey towards advancing customer centricity.
- We aim to provide our clients with a personalized and seamless banking experiences by transforming our branches into relationship and experience centers.
- Gulf Bank plays a significant role in Kuwait's economic development through direct funding and partnerships with other financial institutions.
- Gulf Bank is recognized for its social responsibility and fostering a workplace environment that promotes diversity and inclusion.

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. announced its financial results for the first half ending June 30, 2024. The Bank reported a net profit of KD 28.2 million, a decline of KD 7.6 million or 21.3 percent compared to 2023 first half net profit of KD 35.8 million.

In addition, Gulf Bank recorded an operating income of KD 96.9 million for the first half of 2024, representing an increase of 5 percent compared to the same period of last year. Moreover, operating profit before provisions and impairments has increased to KD 52.6 million, representing a healthy growth of 6.6 percent compared to the first half of 2023.

The decline in net profit for the first half of 2024 is attributed to an increase in total provisions and impairments of KD 11.3 million compared to the same period of last year. Although this rise in total provisions and impairments has impacted short-term results, the Bank is diligently implementing sound risk management strategies to ensure long-term sustainable growth.

As for asset quality, the non-performing loans (NPL) ratio was 1.2 percent as of June 30, 2024, compared to the prior year level of 1.0 percent. Additionally, the Bank continues to have significant non-performing loans coverage ratio of 390 percent including total provisions and collaterals.

Total credit provisions as of 30 June, 2024 reached KD 274 million whereas IFRS 9 accounting requirements (i.e., ECL or expected credit losses) were KD 161 million. As a result, the Bank has a very healthy excess provision level of KD 114 million, above and beyond what is required by the IFRS 9 accounting requirements.

Compared to Dec 31, 2023, total assets increased by 3.6 percent to KD 7.4 billion, net loans and advances increased by 6.9 percent to KD 5.6 billion, while customer deposits increased by 9.5 percent to KD 4.6 billion and total Shareholders' equity reached KD 802 million. The Bank's regulatory Tier 1 ratio of 14.23 percent was 2.23 percent above the regulatory minimum of 12 percent and the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 16.35 percent was 2.35 percent above the regulatory minimum of 14 percent.

Financial performance and growth

Commenting on Gulf Bank's first half 2024 financial results, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Gulf Bank's Chairman said: "For the second quarter of the year 2024, Gulf Bank consistently exhibits robust operational performance, reinforced by strong top-line growth and sound financial position metrics. We faced higher than usual credit costs which resulted in a decline in our net profit growth during the first half of the year compared to the same period of last year, however, we remain confident in the Bank's future potential." He added: "Having said that, we have seen our loan book significantly expand during the first half of 2024, reflecting the success of our strategic

In fuel-guzzling Saudi, electric cars pique interest

RIYADH: For Hamed Al-Rafidain, a Saudi human resources worker, an electric vehicle offers welcome savings, especially since his other car is a fuel-guzzling four-wheel drive favored by motorists in the desert kingdom. The 39-year-old is part of a small but growing EV consumer base in Saudi Arabia, which hopes to become a hub for the technology as it seeks to diversify its economy away from oil.

Although the EV market in the world's largest oil exporter remains small compared with the United States and China, it tripled last year to nearly 800 cars, according to Saudi business news outlet Al-Iqtisadiyah.

"What drove me to buy an electric vehicle was financial considerations," said Rafidain, who spends up to 2,000 riyals (\$530) a month on fuel for his off-road vehicle. "Maintenance costs are also lower compared to a conventional vehicle, with no oil changes and no brake-pad replacements," he added, pointing to the engine-free storage space under the hood of his new car. Chinese EV giant BYD is expected to dominate the Saudi market. Its global rival Tesla of the United States has no dealerships in the Gulf kingdom. With eight million residents, Riyadh experiences traffic jams that contribute to high pollution levels.

Rafidain said he chose an EV because of environmental concerns, noting electric vehicles "help reduce global warming in cities". For a little over \$53,300, he bought a BYD that he mostly uses for short trips within the capital.

Key financial indicators for the first half of 2024

- First half 2024 net profit of KD 28.2 million.
- First half 2024 operating income of KD 96.9 million, an increase of 5 percent compared to same period of last year.
- Operating profit before provisions impairments reached KD 52.6 million, an increase of 6.6 percent compared to same period of last year.
- Net loans and advances grew by 6.9 percent year-to-date to reach KD 5.6 billion.
- Non-performing loan ratio as of 30 June 2024 was 1.2 percent, with a strong non-performance loan coverage ratio of 390 percent.
- Capital ratios as of 30 June 2024, Tier 1 ratio was 14.23 percent and Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) was 16.35 percent.

initiatives in meeting our clients' evolving needs. This growth in loans displays our capacity to navigate and excel in dynamic market conditions, reinforcing our prominent position in the Kuwaiti banking sector."

On the improvement of the Bank's operational profitability, Al-Kharafi stated: "I am pleased with the continuous improvement in our operating profitability, especially in net interest income, operating income, and operating profit. This operational enhancement highlights our focus on strategic growth and financial discipline, reflecting our dedication to expanding strategically and maintaining financial stability."

Operational efficiency

Following the completion of phase II of the new core banking system during the first half of 2024, Waleed Khaled Mandani, Gulf Bank Acting CEO commented: "We are pleased to announce the successful completion of Phase II of our core banking system, a significant milestone in our journey towards advancing customer centricity. This achievement strengthens our operational capabilities and reaffirms our focus to meet the evolving needs of our clients in a digitally driven era." He added: "In partnership with fintech providers, Gulf Bank is ready to leverage these technological foundational changes to drive operational efficiencies and transform our branches into relationship and experience centers aiming to provide a personalized and seamless banking experiences to our clients."

Customer excellence

Gulf Bank continues its strategic journey towards customer service excellence. On this front, Mandani stated: "Gulf Bank is committed to enhancing and developing customer services and implementing the latest and best technological applications, which are rapidly progressing us towards banking industry leadership." He added: "

EV challenges

A lack of charging infrastructure and Saudi Arabia's vast size mean that many view their EVs as suitable for shorter trips, rather than replacements for conventional vehicles. Using an EV for travel outside the city was a "gamble, especially since the infrastructure is still underdeveloped", Rafidain said, noting the range of current batteries is only about 400 kilometers (250 miles).

While BYD and Lucid install charging stations directly at customers' homes, the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Company (Eviq) is working to place them elsewhere, aiming for 5,000 across the country by 2030. EV prices remain high in Saudi Arabia, where fuel costs are lower than in most countries, with a liter of petrol costing \$0.62. A vehicle from Lucid, which opened a factory in Jeddah last year after a billion-dollar Saudi investment, costs \$92,000, but the arrival of BYD is expected to make EVs more affordable. Industry expert Hossam Iraqi said EVs are less popular among Saudis owing to their size and performance in extreme heat.

"Most current electric vehicle production is small to medium-sized, which does not suit the needs of large Saudi families," he said, adding the Gulf region's extreme heat has an impact on battery efficiency. Salesman Hassan Mohammed expects strong EV sales this year, as demand grows at home and abroad.

"More than one car brand has opened its doors in the kingdom and now offers after-sales service, which has encouraged consumers," he said at an exhibition in northern Riyadh, where Saudis test-drove cars. Al-Iqtisadiyah reported in April that Saudi Arabia imported only 779 EVs in 2023, up from 210 the previous year, citing official Saudi statistics. The country is also ramping up domestic production. Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, PIF, now controls 60 percent of Lucid and has secured a deal with South Korea's Hyundai to es-

Our most recent customer offerings included a revamped mobile application, partnerships with local providers to offer our SME customers with advanced payment solutions, and a digital financial market trading platform, catering for our clients' financial and investment needs."

Moreover, Mandani also stressed on the Bank's readiness to support Kuwait's developmental projects in line with the principles of transparency, achievement, and sustainability by stating: "We are dedicated to providing diverse financing plans that meet the evolving needs of this phase. Gulf Bank plays a significant role in Kuwait's urban and economic development and our contribution varies between direct funding and partnerships with other financial institutions. We have already financed multiple initiatives crucial to Kuwait's Vision 2035, particularly in sectors such as oil, construction, and infrastructure, emphasizing our essential role in Kuwait's ongoing progress and prosperity."

Islamic Sharia compliance

During the second quarter of 2024, Gulf Bank announced that the Board of Directors request for the engagement of an international consultant to undertake a feasibility study regarding the potential conversion of Gulf Bank to operate in accordance with Islamic Sharia principles. The Central Bank of Kuwait has granted approval for the commencement of this study.

ESG recognition

Gulf Bank has recently unveiled its 2030 ESG strategy defining its commitment across key pillars: Responsible Governance, Fair Work Environment, Community Engagement, and Banking Responsibility. This strategic initiative reinforces the Bank's operational integrity and illustrates its profound impact in the domain of sustainability.



Celebrating these achievements, Gulf Bank has been honored with two esteemed awards: one acknowledging its exceptional efforts in social responsibility and community engagement from Euromoney, and the other for fostering the best workplace environment that promotes diversity and inclusion from the Gulf International CSR Conference. These awards emphasize the Bank's proactive approach in shaping a future where ESG principles complements its mission and success. Moreover, Gulf Bank was recognized by MEED magazine with two prestigious awards: the "Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives" and the "Best Initiative for Women in Business" award for the Middle East and North Africa region. These awards were received in recognition of Gulf Bank's appreciation for women's role in economic growth and upholding sustainability principles at the workplace and the community.

Credit worthiness

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized internationally in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength by international credit rating agencies for its sound capitalization, improving profitability and strong asset quality. As of June 30, 2024, Gulf Bank has an affirmed 'A3' Long-Term Deposit Rating and 'Positive' outlook from Moody's Investor Services. In addition, the Bank has an affirmed Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a 'Stable' Outlook and a Viability Rating of 'bbb-' by Fitch Ratings. Moreover, Gulf Bank has also an affirmed Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating of 'A+' with a 'Stable' Outlook from Capital Intelligence Ratings.

Appreciation

Al-Kharafi concluded his remarks by stating: "Moving forward, we anticipate sustainable growth in the years ahead, supported by our efforts towards innovation, solid financial performance, and customer-focused approach." He added: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our shareholders for their ongoing trust, and our employees for their commitment and dedication. I would also like to thank the Regulatory Authorities for their continuous support. Finally, I want to thank our customers for their loyalty, and reiterate our commitment to offering them the best banking experience."



RIYADH: Men inspect an electric car at a show in Riyadh. Although the EV market in the world's largest oil exporter remains small compared with the United States and China, it tripled last year to nearly 800 cars, according to Saudi business news outlet Al-Iqtisadiyah. — AFP

establish a plant in the kingdom for both EVs and petrol-powered cars. Additionally, Saudi EV brand CEER, launched in 2022, plans to start production in 2025.

Earlier this year, Saudi Industry Minister Bandar Al-Kharif said the country was aiming to produce 300,000 EVs annually, without giving a timeline. Riyadh, targeting carbon neutrality by 2050, was also in

talks with battery producers, he said. For now, some still prefer hybrid vehicles, which use both batteries and petrol to go longer distances. "The balance between electricity and gasoline is economical and convenient," said Omar el-Shami, a 43-year-old Egyptian pharmacist, as he charged the car he bought for his wife. "Things may change in the future," he said. — AFP

Business

S&P affirms Burgan Bank's 'BBB+/A-2' credit ratings with a 'stable' outlook

Agency confirms the strength of bank's financial core, its prudent risk management

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced that Standard & Poor's Global Ratings (S&P) has affirmed its long-term and short-term issuer credit ratings at "BBB+/A-2" with a "stable" outlook, reflecting its expectations that the Bank's financial profile will remain broadly solid.

The global agency assessed Burgan's Standalone Credit profile (SACP) at "bb+", Anchor at "bbb-", Support at "+3", and Additional Factors at "0". The agency stated that the released credit ratings bear no impact on the Bank's status, confirming its creditworthiness, solid financial core, and vigilant risk strategy. The S&P rating disclosure highlighted Burgan Bank's strategic asset reallocation, which aimed at reducing its exposure to risky jurisdictions while refocusing the business on core markets in Kuwait and across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The report further noted that some of these reallocations improved the Bank's capitalization, which S&P foresees to remain adequate over



the upcoming 12-24 months.

Commenting on S&P's credit rating report, Khalid Al-Zouman, Chief Financial Officer at Burgan Bank, said: "We strive every day to ensure that Burgan Bank's financial core remains strong, resilient and poised for constant growth,

through meticulous and forward-looking business decisions. The success of our efforts is evident in the latest S&P ratings, which confirm the strength of the Bank's financial standing and the soundness of its risk management strategies. To continue to be recognized by esteemed rating agencies such as S&P is the ultimate testament to our creditworthiness and our long-term growth potential, and we look forward to further expansion that add to Burgan Bank's already robust financial base."

Al-Zouman asserted that Burgan Bank's consistent growth and confident expansions are driven by its vision to become the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait, resting its efforts on the strategic pillars of asset re-allocation, digital transformation, human capital development, and adopting ESG principles in order to deliver an outstanding banking experience that meets its customers' needs and fulfills their aspirations.



ANOSY, Madagascar: A health worker measures the circumference of a child's arm in the commune of Sampona, in southern Madagascar's Anosy region. The Indian Ocean island nation of Madagascar, the first to face food shortages linked to climate change has experienced poor rains in recent months. - AFP

Climate and finance crises could leave 600m hungry by 2030

NEW DELHI: Climate-driven shocks, coupled with scant finance and government action, will leave nearly 600 million people living in hunger by 2030, the head of the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) told The Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview. Speaking ahead of Wednesday's launch of IFAD's report on the global state of hunger and nutrition, the agency's president Alvaro Lario said that missing the UN's Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger by 2030 would lead to more forced migration, fewer new jobs and worsening conflict over resources, especially in regions with growing populations such as Africa. More than a third of the world's population - about 2.8 billion people - could not afford a healthy diet in 2022, the report said.

Of those people, more than 70 percent live in low-income countries. The report pointed out that lack of improvement in food security and uneven access to healthy diets could lead to 582 million people being chronically undernourished by the end of the decade, more than half of them in Africa. "Urgent steps are needed if we want to really bring down the numbers of almost 600 million of chronically undernourished people by 2030," Lario said, adding, "the reality is we know how to do it, it's just a matter of political will." Findings of the IFAD report will inform the agenda of the currently ongoing G20 ministers' meeting in Brazil to discuss issues of hunger and poverty.

The IFAD chief told The Thomson Reuters Foundation that floods, droughts and high temperatures driven by climate change are exacerbating hunger and malnutrition around the world. He also blamed the lack of infrastructure to cope with climate shocks, debt-ridden economies and large gaps in climate finance for food production, storage and distribution. This could hamper the UN's new plan, presented at COP28 last year, to end hunger and malnutrition without breaching the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Food systems - including growing methods, fertilizers, storage, transportation and waste - account for nearly a third of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. At COP28 last year, the U.N. plan, for the first time, addressed emissions from how the world grows and consumes food. This brought attention to the idea of a "just transition" in agriculture, and support for farmers in moving to more climate-friendly ways of growing food. Small-scale producers feed more than 70 percent of the world's population, but account for less than one-third of agricultural land and resources. "Asking these hundreds of millions of small farmers who, in many cases, can barely make a living, to do a transition to certain agricultural practices, has a cost," the IFAD president said.

He added that supporting these small-scale producers with loans, infrastructure and government policies that create good ecosystems "where they can thrive" is crucial. However, Lario pointed out that the financing for food security and nutrition has not kept pace with the increasing need to tackle these challenges. "People who live in the poor rural areas, the small-scale producers, are actually receiving less financing than before, compared to the overall climate finance flows," Lario said. Last year, research from the US-based Climate Policy Initiative looked at investments in climate adaptation linked to food security for small-scale farmers. Lario highlighted that, according to the research, funding for these producers went from 1.7 percent of all global climate finance in 2018 to 0.8 percent in 2020. Besides production, the IFAD president said that investment in distribution, storage, access to markets, and quality assurance is also urgently needed. "All these areas of the value chain can actually create a lot of jobs." - Reuters

Illicit banknotes in Libya, some made by Russia, hit dinar

LIBYA: Unofficial Libyan banknotes have been exchanged for real dollars and contributed to the dinar's devaluing, three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters, adding that some notes were printed by Russia and exported to eastern Libya this year while others were printed illicitly within Libya.

The new banknotes have been described as counterfeit by the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) in Tripoli but are being changed into hard currency on the black market or through local banks, according to a source in Libya's eastern government, a Libyan banking source, and a diplomatic source. The money has been used to fund infrastructure projects in the east following last year's devastating floods, the eastern government source and the banking source said. The money may also be used to finance Russian mercenary activity in Libya and the Sahel, the diplomatic source said.

Russia's role in the infusion of new banknotes into Libya was flagged to Reuters by The Sentry, an international investigative and policy group focused on corruption and war crimes. Neither the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya nor its branch in Benghazi responded to requests for comment from Reuters. There was no immediate response from the Libyan National Army, which holds all of eastern Libya, to a Reuters request for comment. Russia's state money printer, Goznak, did not respond to a written request for comment.

Libya split in 2014 between warring eastern and

western factions. Despite a 2020 truce and efforts to formally reunify institutions, a political solution has proven elusive with new bursts of conflict constantly on the horizon. The US State Department in June sanctioned Goznak for printing more than \$1 billion in counterfeit Libyan currency, without saying where or when the notes were printed or delivered. Russia had supplied eastern authorities with several billion dinars from 2016 until a 2020 ceasefire, helping allied eastern commander Khalifa Haftar and the government he backed in Benghazi. Its provision of new banknotes this year was not previously known.

The dinars imported between 2016-20 were formally issued by CBL's eastern branch in Benghazi and bore the signature of its governor Ali Al-Hibri. Their issuance aggravated economic splits inside Libya, with different exchange rates in different parts of the country. After the ceasefire and banking reunification efforts, the main CBL branch in Tripoli under governor Sadiq Al-Kabir accepted the Russian-printed notes issued by Hibri as legal tender.

Hibri was replaced in 2022. Kabir then said the new notes should not be used, but authorities in eastern Libya have insisted that any institutions declining them would be punished. Eastern Libya, where the national parliament is based, is in effect under the control of Haftar, who deployed Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group during fighting in 2019-20, according to UN experts. The Russian fighters have remained, the United States military has said. "The Haftar family's hegemonic control over eastern Libya poses a serious threat to the country's entire banking system," said Charles Cater, head of investigations at The Sentry. Most of the unofficial currency is in 50-dinar notes. The CBL issued a statement earlier this year identifying four kinds of 50-dinar note: those officially printed for the

central bank, those printed in the past by Goznak for the eastern CBL branch under Hibri, and two new issuances that it called counterfeit. The diplomatic source said one of those issuances was of higher quality and was printed in Russia and imported. The other less sophisticated notes appear to have been printed inside Libya, the source said.

The Libyan banking source and the eastern government source both said an illicit dinar-printing operation was taking place in eastern Libya. Dinars are converted to hard currency either through black market money changers or via deposits made in eastern banks by shell companies that use import letters of credit to send US dollars from the central bank to companies overseas, the three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters. "The 'exporter' is in fact a shell company controlled by the same individuals behind the banknote-printing operation. No goods are shipped and the dollars are pocketed by the criminal network," said Cater. The CBL briefly stopped issuing letters of credit in the past, amid allegations that some importers were using them to obtain cheap dollars.

To counter the impact of counterfeit notes, the CBL announced in April that it would withdraw all 50-dinar notes from circulation by the end of August. Libya's dinar began falling last year but slid more quickly during early 2024, a slump the diplomatic source and the banking source attributed to the infusion of new notes in the east. The diplomatic source said it was "a major concern" that the Russians were printing dinars that were being converted on the black market into hard currency, impacting the dinar and ultimately being used to pay for Wagner-related debts or for the Africa Corps - the name of the Russian military presence in Africa that has succeeded Wagner group since the death of Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2023. - Reuters

Eurozone business growth stalls in July, PMIs show

LONDON: Growth in eurozone business activity stalled this month as a tepid expansion in the bloc's dominant services industry failed to offset a deeper downturn among manufacturers, a survey showed on Wednesday. HCOB's preliminary composite Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by S&P Global, dropped to 50.1 this month from June's 50.9, barely above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction and defying expectations in a Reuters poll for an uptick to 51.1. "The euro zone's flash July PMIs corroborate the message sent by other leading indicators that the recovery is faltering. If leading indicators continue to underwhelm, this may result in a downgrade to our GDP growth forecasts," said Rory Fennessy at Oxford Economics.

The bloc's economy will average 0.7 percent growth this year and 1.4 percent next, according to a Reuters poll earlier this month. The region's No 1 economy, Germany, will expand a meager 0.2 percent this year and 1.2 percent in 2025, the poll showed. Those German numbers could also be revised down as business activity there unexpectedly contracted this month, dragged down by a steep and dramatic fall in manufacturing output, its PMI indicated. However, German consumer sentiment is set to recover significantly as households' income expectations hit their highest point in over two years due to slightly lower inflation and noticeable wage increases, a survey published jointly by GfK and the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions showed. Gearing up to host the Olympic Games from July 26, France's dominant services industry received a boost although the country's manufacturing sector weakened further. Outside of the eurozone, British business activ-



FRANKFURT: European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde addresses a press conference on the Eurozone's monetary policy, at the central bank's headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. -- AFP

ity picked up this month, bolstered by the fastest manufacturing growth in two years and the strongest inflow of new orders since April 2023.

The figures may cheer Prime Minister Keir Starmer's new government - which is targeting faster growth to allow higher public spending - and the Bank of England, as inflation pressures fell to their lowest in more than three years.

Expectations about the coming year in the eurozone waned again, suggesting business managers do not expect an imminent turnaround. The composite future output index registered a six-month low of 60.0 compared to June's 60.8. A PMI covering the common currency area's services sector fell to 51.9 this month from 52.8 versus a poll prediction for an increase to 53.0. Services firms faced a steeper increase in input costs this month but raised their prices charged at a shallower rate. The output prices index eased to 53.2 from 53.5. That could be welcomed by policymakers at the European Central Bank who left interest rates on hold last week, having lowered them in June, but said September's decision was "wide open". - Reuters

UK's easyJet sees no signs of softening demand

LONDON: EasyJet's CEO said on Wednesday the budget airline was not seeing any signs of softening demand and fares were holding up, as its quarterly report and upbeat outlook for its holidays business reassured investors and sent shares 8 percent higher. EasyJet's third-quarter report was in contrast to Ryanair's warning on Monday of deteriorating ticket prices, which sent chills across the European airline industry, deepening fears of a weak summer. Shares in easyJet, which have lost 16 percent of their value so far this year, rose 8 percent in early trade after it also reported a 16 percent rise in pretax profit in the April-June quarter and said it was on track for a record summer.

Sri Lanka cuts lending rates after debt restructure

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank cut benchmark interest rates Wednesday, marking the first reduction since finalizing debt restructure plans with its international creditors. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said it was trimming both lending and deposit rates by 25 basis points to continue easing monetary policy in a benign inflation environment.

Inflation in June moderated to 1.7 percent compared with a peak of nearly 70 percent in September 2022 at the height of the country's unprecedented foreign exchange crisis. "The monetary board (of the central bank) underscored the need to signal its desire to continue eased monetary conditions to sustain the revival of economic activity," the bank said in a statement.

Wednesday's rate cut comes after a 50-basis-point reduction in March. The government said earlier this month it had finalized a repayment deal with its international sovereign bond holders, the final step in restructuring its external debt after a sovereign default in April 2022.

The bank said the economy had rebounded since the second quarter of last year. The first three months of this year saw 5.4 percent growth, followed by robust expansion in the second quarter, the bank said. The economy shrank 2.3 percent last year after a record 7.3 percent in 2022, when months of protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has doubled taxes, cut generous energy subsidies and raised prices of essentials to shore up state revenues after securing a \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund. - AFP

Its stock, which had been battered by Ryanair's warning on Monday, was the biggest gainer on the FTSE 100 and among the top in the pan-European index on Wednesday. "You will have some parts of the network and some flights that are cheaper than... last year, but some would be slightly more expensive," CEO Johan told journalists.

"But on average, the fare environment is very similar to what we saw last year." Airline executives at the Farnborough Airshow on Monday said the post-pandemic boom in air travel has normalized as travelers balk at higher fares, after Ryanair posted a profit slump and warned ticket prices were continuing to deteriorate. Lundgren said it was difficult to comment on the comparisons with Ryanair since easyJet operates head-to-head with the Irish airline on only 20 percent of its network. "Given the Ryanair commentary this week on a large weakening in demand/pricing, the outlook for peak summer from (easyJet) appears to be 'ok' given the market has been expecting the worst," JPMorgan analysts said in a note. - Reuters



LUTON, UK: Members of staff work on computers in the Maintenance Control Room inside EasyJet's new operations Integrated Control Centre (ICC) in Luton, north of London. - AFP

Business

NBK ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Egypt's stability returns; new govt can build on reform momentum

CA deficit widens on lower gas production • Growth may have bottomed out in Jan-March

KUWAIT: It did not take long for the Egyptian authorities to capitalize on the economic reforms that took place in March, with the appointment in July of a new Cabinet welcomed locally and regionally and injecting fresh optimism for the first time in years. We see in particular scope for greater coherence on economic policy with three key economy-focused ministries (Finance, Investment and the newly-merged Planning, Economic Development & International Cooperation) headed by a young generation (aged 50 on average) of officials with backgrounds in international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank helping to drive policy forward, albeit based on a medium-term plan that we are yet to see.

Meanwhile, the economy has started to show early signs of recovery with inflation cooling, growth indicators ticking up, the currency stable and the external finances correcting sharply. Likely subsidy cuts over coming months should not disrupt the trend of lower inflation, providing space for interest rates to fall from September. Major economic challenges still lie ahead. Egypt is now emerging from its crisis stage thanks to critical one-off policy moves and deals including the currency devaluation and mega-investment from the UAE in Ras El Hekma that helped secure large capital inflows. Markets, investors and rating agencies will now be looking at what comes next – and in particular for the government to embark on the second stage of the reform process relating to enhancing the business environment and strong communication of the new agenda.

Growth may have bottomed out in Jan-March

Latest data show economic growth continuing its downward path, slowing for the fifth consecutive quarter to 2.2 percent y/y in Q3 FY23/24 (Jan-Mar 2024) from 2.3 percent in the previous quarter. We expect Q4 growth to come in close to 2.5 percent with the full year at 2.4 percent versus 3.5 percent the previous year.

Supporting this view, the PMI activity gauge picked up in April-June to 48.5 versus 47.6 the previous quarter and ended the year at 49.6, close to the 50 neutral level which we expect to be surpassed in the coming months. This was the highest level for the PMI since September 2021. Several sub-indicators already exceeded the 50 mark including the employment, future output, and new export orders indices. In our opinion, this reflects the improvement in overall macro stability including lower inflation, the stable exchange rate, and better availability of foreign currency. We expect further improvement in the coming period as inflation falls further and interest rates start to fall. We forecast growth accelerating in the coming year (FY 24/25) to 3.5-4.0 percent.

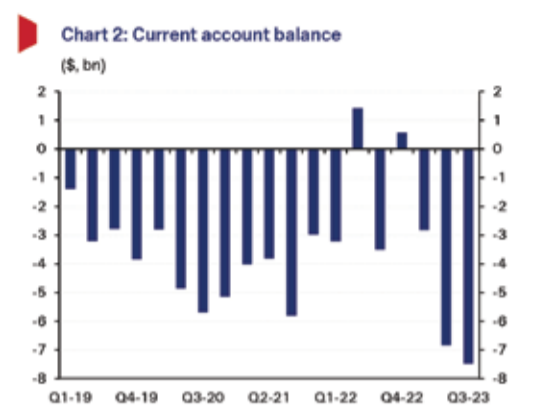
CA deficit widens

The current account deficit widened in 9M FY 23/24 (July to March) to \$17.1 billion from \$5.3 billion in the same period in FY 22/23 mainly on the back of a significant drop in Egypt's natural gas production, which pushed the oil trade balance into a \$5.1 billion deficit. On the other hand, the non-oil trade deficit improved by \$1.5 billion to \$23.7 billion mainly on the back of a 3 percent drop in imports due to import restrictions. Remittances from Egyptians living abroad also slowed to \$14.5 billion (-17 percent y/y). On a positive note, tourism revenues remained strong, growing by 5.3 percent y/y even amid all the regional tensions.

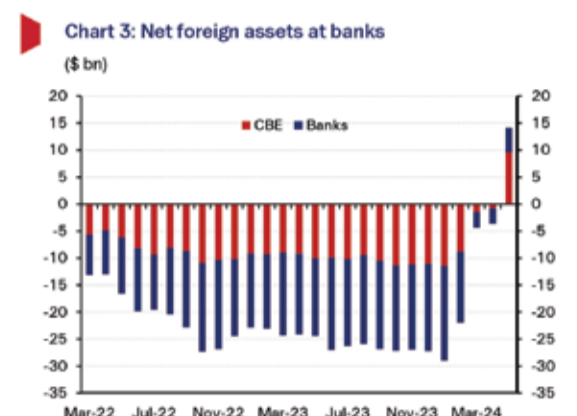
The situation was positive on the capital account front as the EGP devaluation in March allowed for the release of the \$15 billion first tranche of the Ras El Hekma deal along with significant inflows from carry trade investments. This was reflected in FDI reaching \$23.7 billion (from \$7.9 billion) and a net



Source: Ministry of Planning, NBK estimates
Note: Quarters are for the fiscal year, so Q1 24 = Q1 FY23/24



Source: Central Bank of Egypt, NBK estimates Note: quarters are for fiscal year



Source: Central Bank of Egypt, NBK estimates

Table 1: Forecast Table

	FY20/21	FY21/22	FY22/23	FY23/24	FY24/25
Real Indicators					
Nominal GDP (EGPbn)	6,663	7,940	10,337	13,810	16,656
Real GDP (%)	3.3	6.7	3.8	2.4	4.0
External Indicators					
Current account balance (\$bn)	-18.4	-16.6	-4.7	-20	-10
Current account balance (% of GDP)	-4.4	-3.6	-1.6	-6.3	-2.5
Gross official reserves (\$bn)	39.4	31.5	34.8	43	-
Fiscal Indicators					
Fiscal deficit (% of GDP)	7.1	6.1	6.0	4.0	8.0
Primary balance (% of GDP)	1.4	1.1	1.5	6.2	2.5
Monetary Indicators					
Inflation (period average, %)	4.5	8.4	24.1	33.50	19.00
Interest rates (end of period, %)	8.2	11.7	19.7	27.75	17.75
Exchange rate (EGP per USD, end of period)	15.6	16.2	25.8	48.6	-

inflow of \$14.6 billion in portfolio investments (versus a net outflow of \$3.4 billion). The overall balance of payments saw a surplus of \$4.1 billion (from a \$0.3 billion deficit).

We expect the current account deficit to shrink in the final quarter of FY23/24 (April-June) to around \$1-2 billion (from \$8.2 billion in Q3) on the back of a rise in tourism receipts and recovery in remittances. On a full-year basis, the deficit could be \$19-21 billion, the largest deficit in Egypt's history, but should correct once again in FY 24/25 to \$10 billion as a 10-15 percent import recovery is offset by a higher remittances, continued strong tourism receipts, and the maintenance of a more flexible exchange rate that keeps the pound in line with its fair value. We see limited scope for a natural gas production recovery over the coming two years.

The authorities received the final tranche of the Ras El Hekma investment deal from the UAE in May worth \$14 billion (and \$11 billion in the form of UAE deposits to be converted into EGP) pushing FX reserves to an all-time high of \$46.3 billion as of June 2024. Net foreign assets at banks (both central and commercial banks) has turned into a positive position of \$14 billion as of May, from a negative position of -\$3.7 billion in April. The authorities clearly delivered on their promise to utilize majority of the Ras El Hekma proceeds to rebuild FX buffers, however we think that that improvement is now mostly behind us. Our outlook of BoP dynamics shows that it will be difficult to sustain ongoing rises in foreign reserves due to a net cumulative financing gap of \$10 billion over the coming 2 years until the end of FY 25/26. Additionally, we see no official urge for even higher foreign reserves as they are already more than satisfactory covering close to 7 months of imports.

Yields on Egypt's 5 yr-Eurobond has maintained their compression from the past months standing at

9.5 percent as of mid-July from 15 percent pre-devaluation in February, while 5-yr CDS levels (a measure of default risk) have narrowed to around 570bps from 1100 bps and above. The risk compression could be followed soon by upgrades to Egypt's credit rating from the current B-/Caal by at least two notches to B+/B2 by S&P and Moody's. Key factors needed to earn this upgrade have been ticked, including sustaining a more flexible EGP exchange rate, strong external support, and a significant improvement in the NFA position.

Inflation has continued its clear downward trend over the past quarter, averaging 29.4 percent y/y in Q2 (CY) down from 34.0 percent in Q1 as the EGP devaluation impact fades and smoother FX availability allows for improved supply of goods. Average monthly price rises have slowed sharply to 0.7 percent m/m for Q2 from 4.7 percent for Q1. In early June, the government cut bread subsidies resulting in a 300 percent increase in the price of a loaf from EGPO.05 to EGPO.20. This added around 1.2 percent to June's CPI which rose 1.6 percent overall as subsidized bread represents less than 0.5 percent of the CPI basket. Next in line could be changes in fixed/subsidized electricity and fuel prices, though we expect the inflation impact to be limited (fuel and electricity represent around 4 percent of the CPI basket and a 20 percent increase adds about 0.8 percent to the CPI).

We expect inflation to average 25 percent in H2 (July to December) of 2024 down from 31 percent in the first half with a strong possibility that inflation ends the year below 24 percent. We forecast inflation to average 19 percent for FY24/25 (much lower than previously on the back of softer than expected inflation post-March devaluation) down from 34 percent in FY23/24. We continue to wait for the CBE to amend the inflation target timeline to Q4 25 (from Q4 24); a target of around 10 percent would be met

based on current dynamics, in our view.

CBE to cut rates in H2

The central bank kept rates unchanged throughout Q2 (April to June) at 27.75 percent on the discount rate, while average 1-year treasury bills have dropped by 2 percent since March to 26 percent, which implies that markets are looking at 1-2 percent in rate cuts in the coming period. As inflation has decelerated over the past months (27.5 percent as of June), real interest rates have turned positive for the first time since January 2022. As inflation falls further through 2024, we expect the CBE to commence the monetary easing cycle in the coming period starting potentially in September, with cuts of a cumulative 400 bps rate cuts by year-end.

Household credit growth remained in strong growth territory but unlike business credit there was no strong adjustment to the devaluation with growth at 24 percent y/y in the 3 months to May versus 23 percent for the previous 3 months. On a real-terms basis, credit to private firms recorded -2 percent y/y, improving hugely from -14 percent for the period Dec 23 – Feb 24. As for households, it stood at -7.2 percent, improving from -10.3 percent.

The improvement in real credit growth in both the private and household segments are early signs of economic recovery and proof of the heavy burden on economic activity well before the official devaluation took place in March. As inflation cools in the coming period so will credit growth in EGP terms but possible interest rate cuts in FY24/25 should encourage firms to take on longer-term loans targeted towards CAPEX, not only OPEX spending. We expect credit to grow by 25 percent in FY24/25 down from 31.5 percent in FY23/24, but it will grow on a real basis by +6 percent from -2 percent.

The government utilized 50 percent of the Ras El Hekma deal proceeds (\$12 billion once UAE bank deposits – which was not 'fresh' money – are excluded/EGP580 billion) to reduce the fiscal deficit evident in the July-May FY23/24 deficit which came in at 3.6 percent of GDP (versus 7.7 percent without the Ras El Hekma proceeds) and a ballooning primary balance of 5.9 percent (1.7 percent ex Ras El Hekma). We expect a deficit of 4 percent of GDP and a primary balance of 6.2 percent of GDP for the full year. In FY 24/25, we expect a normalized deficit close to 8.0 percent (7.3 percent for the government target), mainly on the absence of another big one-off revenue boost in FY 24/25 (at least for now). The government is allocating EGP 154 billion for the energy subsidy which entails a 20 percent price hike (gasoline, diesel, and butane cylinders) in each quarter in FY 24/25. However, we think the government might opt to go for a lower price hike (10-15 percent) which means the final subsidy could be in the range of EGP 210 billion, adding EGP 60 billion (0.6 percent) to the fiscal deficit.

BoE could trim bank rate on Aug 1, once more this year

LONDON: The Bank of England will trim bank rate to 5 percent next week, a majority of economists said in a Reuters poll, and with inflation expected to hover around target, it will embark on a slow and steady reduction path with one more cut this year.

However, markets are only pricing in around a 45 percent chance of a cut and several economists declined to say whether the first cut would come in August or September. Bank Rate has been at a 16-year high of 5.25 percent since last August. The BoE was one of the first central banks to start raising borrowing costs after the COVID-19 pandemic and, like its peers, is now looking at easing policy.

Over 80 percent of economists, 49 of 60, in the July 18-24 poll said the Bank would cut to 5 percent on Aug 1. However, a similar sample of respondents in a June poll were more convinced of a move next week, with 97 percent predicting it then. The Bank will publish its quarterly Monetary Policy Report alongside the rate announcement next week and hold a press conference.

"We look for a 25 basis point rate cut at next week's meeting, although the call appears much closer than it did several weeks back. The case for lower rates is far from clear," noted Allan Monks at J.P. Morgan. "If rates are lowered in August, it looks likely to happen on a close 5-4 vote."

In June, the rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee voted 7-2 to leave Bank Rate on hold but some members said their thinking was now "finely balanced". An August cut would put the BoE ahead of the US Federal Reserve, which is expected to wait until September, but behind the European Central Bank which made its first cut in June and although



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Governor of the Bank of England Andrew Bailey giving evidence to the Treasury Committee at the House of Commons, in London. — AFP

it paused this month, it said September was "wide open". British inflation held at 2 percent in June – the Bank's target – but defied forecasts for a slight fall, and while wages grew a bit more slowly, they still increased at a pace normally too strong for the Bank, and markets reduced bets on an August move. Wages rose 5.7 percent in the three months to May from a year ago, close to double the rate that would be consistent with the BoE's 2 percent inflation target. Still, inflation was expected to be relatively benign and close to target through 2025.

Following August's trim, the bank will pause in September before cutting 25 basis points in November to put Bank Rate at 4.75 percent, median forecasts showed. It will take another breather in December. Asked what was more likely regarding their end-2024 forecasts, 77 percent of respondents, or 17 of 22, to an extra question said that bank rate would be higher than they expect. It will be a similar slow and steady pace next year with 25 basis point cuts in the first and second quarters, 50 in the third and 25 in the fourth, to put bank rate at 3.50 percent by end-2025. — Reuters

Delta returning to normal operations

LOS ANGELES: Delta Air Lines, which has axed more than 6,000 flights since a widespread IT system failure on Friday, said it would resume normal operations Thursday. The Atlanta-based carrier as of 8 am ET (1200 GMT) had canceled just 47 of Wednesday's flights – only 1 percent of its daily total – after scrapping 511 on Tuesday and 1,160 on Monday.

CEO Ed Bastian said in a statement that Delta expected "minimal" cancellations Wednesday and a return to normal operations Thursday, adding: "Our initial efforts to stabilize the operations were difficult and frustratingly slow and complex."

A software update by global cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike triggered system problems for Microsoft customers, including many airlines, on Friday. But disruptions subsided the next day at other major US carriers while persisting at Delta. The US Transportation Department opened an investigation

Tuesday into the Delta disruptions, which affected more than 500,000 passengers and stranded people across the United States.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said the investigation is focused on how the breakdown happened, why it had taken Delta so much longer than others to recover, and the level of Delta's customer service resources. "We require a basic level of customer service," he added.

Many customers complained of waiting hours for assistance as the airline's helplines were overwhelmed. Some were forced to rent cars, driving hundreds of miles to get to destinations, while others said they would have to wait days for new flights. Representative Rick Larsen, the top Democrat on the House Transportation Committee, said he will introduce legislation to boost the operational resilience of airlines in the near future. "The slow response by some airlines to this meltdown has been unacceptable," Larsen said. Senate Commerce Committee chair Maria Cantwell said she is concerned Delta is not complying with passenger rights obligations under a new law. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: Travelers wait on the check-in floor of the Delta Air Lines terminal at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) on July 23, 2024. — AFP

THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2024

US rapper Snoop Dogg to carry Olympic torch

American rapper Snoop Dogg will be among the carriers of the Olympic flame this Friday as it makes its final rounds before the Paris Games' opening ceremony. He will carry it through the streets of Saint-Denis, the ethnically diverse northern Paris suburb that is home to the Olympic Stadium and Aquatics Centre, the town's mayor Mathieu Hanotin told AFP on

Monday. Other carriers in Saint-Denis Friday will include French actress Laetitia Casta, French rapper MC So-laar and Ukrainian retired pole-vaulter Sergey Bubka. The Olympic flame has spent two months crossing France, and Friday morning it will be carried through the athletes' village which straddles Saint-Denis and neighboring Saint-

Ouen, before going to the Olympic Stadium and the Aquatics Centre a few kilometers away. Snoop Dogg, 52, was born in greater Los Angeles, which will host the next Games in 2028. The torch relay will not be the rapper's only appearance at the 2024 Games as he will also be an Olympic commentator for US television station NBC. —AFP



Snoop Dogg runs on the track with a custom bib number on Day Three 2024 US Olympic Team Trials Track & Field at Hayward Field on June 23, 2024 in Eugene, Oregon. —AFP



Visitors role-playing as firefighters during an adult-only event at KidZania.



Visitors looking at workers' uniforms during an adult-only event at KidZania.

Theme park's novel bid to fix South Korea youth unemployment



Kang Jae-hyung, president of children's job experience theme park KidZania South Korea.



Kang Jae-hyung (2R), president of children's job experience theme park KidZania South Korea.



Visitors role-playing as announcers in a mock broadcast studio during an adult-only event at KidZania.

At a kids' role-playing theme park in Seoul, 23-year-old Park Woo-joon is on a very adult mission: the university-educated but unemployed South Korean is searching for his future career. Part of a Mexican-owned global chain, KidZania typically offers young children the chance to play at dozens of different jobs, from firefighter to dentist, in giant indoor centers, including one in Seoul that receives hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. But KidZania South Korea has been pioneering a new use for its Seoul venue: helping unemployed young people find their real-life calling, at nostalgia-laced, wildly popular, adults-only events.

Despite labor shortages linked to its super-low birthrate, youth unemployment in South Korea is stubbornly high—the result, experts say, of a mismatch between the highly educated youth and the realities of the country's labor market. Park has a degree in business administration but has not been able to find a job he wants, so last month he was one of 500 people who bought a ticket for the sold-out "KidZania" event for adults—the name is a pun in Korean, effectively meaning "Not Kids". At the sprawling indoor theme park, while people dressed as police officers and Supreme Court judges role-played in purpose-built areas, Park told AFP he was eager to "experience as much as possible".

He's hoping that, by testing out a bunch of potential careers, he might have a "lightbulb" moment and discover what he should be doing with his life. "I think it's a great way for people who are unemployed to have fun and learn at the same time," he told AFP.

Nostalgia tour

The adult events were the brain-child of Kang Jae-hyung, president of KidZania South Korea, who told AFP he wanted to help the young



Visitors role-playing as radio DJs in a mock radio studio during an adult-only event at KidZania.

people who might have come to the park when it first opened in 2010. "The kids who were seven years old when they first came here are now 21," Kang said. His colleagues were skeptical about the idea and he initially faced internal opposition, he said, but tickets for the first event sold out immediately. Kang said that many young South Korean adults need to tap into their innate sense of fun, and not take working life too seriously.

"I just want them to remember what they wanted to do when they were young," said Kang, adding that it was important "not to crush children's dreams". Lee Soo-min, 20, has memories of going to KidZania—and said the place seemed the same when she returned over a decade later. "But it seems I've changed," she said. Standing in line at a radio studio to try her hand at being a DJ, Lee, a university student who said she was trying to figure out what to do with her life, told AFP: "Now, I begin to take these experiences seriously."

Aspirations vs reality

With the world's lowest birthrate, South Korea's population has long been shrinking. The country's working-age population will begin falling off from 2028, official projections show, and many sectors of the economy, from agriculture to restaurants and care homes, already suffer from widespread labor shortages, with immigration tightly limited. Even so, the country has persistently high youth unemployment, currently at 6.2 percent, more than double the overall rate of 2.9 percent, official figures show.

The number of young people classified as "resting"—neither employed nor actively seeking work—hit 426,000 last month, the second-highest rate since records began in 2003. The highest was during the pandemic. The problem, experts say, is that young South Koreans would rather not work than work in a job perceived as unpopular or beneath them.

For example, nearly half of young South Koreans are reluctant to join



Visitors waiting in line to role-play as radio DJs in front of a mock radio studio during an adult-only event at KidZania.

small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), official figures show—even though such businesses make up some 98 percent of the economy, with high-profile corporations such as Samsung just 2 percent. This mismatch between the aspirations of highly educated young people and the realities of the labor market "gradually deepens unemployment among highly educated youth," said Hwang Gwang-hoon, an associate research fellow at the Korea Employment Information Service.

South Korea has turned to automation of production lines and even CCTV to ease labor crunches—with, for example, many convenience stores now unmanned—but the country also needs to create more "quality jobs", Hwang said, especially in SMEs. For KidZania's Kang, unemployed young people need to let go of the fears and embarrassments that may be holding them back in the job market. "Do what you want to do. Don't be self-conscious," he said. —AFP



Visitors role-playing as researchers in a mock burger laboratory during an adult-only event at KidZania.



Visitors dancing in a mock audition studio during an adult-only event at KidZania.



Visitors looking around a kids role-playing theme park during an adult-only event at KidZania.

Lifestyle



Schnitzel with French fries are ready to be served at the inn 'Gasthaus Stich' in Pfoesing, Lower Austria, north of Vienna.



Meat is coated with breadcrumbs to prepare a Schnitzel in the kitchen of the inn 'Gasthaus Stich'.



Kitchen chef Eva Leimer prepares meat for a Schnitzel in the kitchen of the inn 'Gasthaus Stich'.



Meat is dipped in egg before it is coated with breadcrumbs to prepare a Schnitzel in the kitchen of the inn 'Gasthaus Stich'.



Kitchen chef Eva Leimer poses with a plate of prepared Schnitzel at the inn 'Gasthaus Stich'. — AFP photos

RIGHT-WING 'SCHNITZEL BONUS' REWARDS 'TRADITIONAL' AUSTRIAN EATERIES

Staples of Austrian cooking such as schnitzel have proved particularly vital for Gasthaus Stich, a restaurant in the village of Pfoesing. They have helped the struggling business to survive by earning it a subsidy from right-wing state authorities in a controversial program that benefits only traditional Austrian cuisine. The subsidy for restaurants that serve regional and "traditional food" has been derided in the media and by opposition parties as a "Schnitzel bonus".

It excludes restaurants serving less overtly authentic Austrian fare such as kebabs or pizza, for example. As a typical Austrian staple, schnitzel - a boneless piece of meat that has been pounded thin to make it more tender and then coated and fried - qualifies for the cash. "They gave us 10,000 euros," or \$11,000, said Michael Stich, the 39-year-old owner of the family business in Pfoesing, population 300, in the state of Lower Austria.

The village's last surviving restaurant is an institution, "like the church, town hall or fire station", he told AFP. "If this place didn't exist, it would be difficult for the entire community." Austria's conservative Chancellor Karl Nehammer has said he wants to defend the country's "Leitkultur," or "dominant culture", as he seeks to bolster support ahead of September elections. Campaigning on an anti-immigration platform, he has evoked the concept, born in Germany in the 1990s, as polls indicate the far right will come out on top



Gastronomer Hermann (right) and his son Michael Stich pose in front of their inn 'Gasthaus Stich' in Pfoesing, Weinviertel, Lower Austria, north of Vienna.

for the first time in the Alpine nation.

'Discriminatory'

Lower Austria - governed by the conservatives together with the far right - introduced the "Schnitzel bonus" this year for owners who open a restaurant in a town without one or take over an existing one. "The subsidy was very important for us," said Michael Stich's father, Hermann Stich, 62. He contin-

ues to help out after his son became the third generation to run the business at the beginning of the year.

As he taps beer served over a large wooden counter, he notes the impact of energy and labor costs that are hurting the restaurant, which sports hunting antlers on the wall. Since 2000, one in three restaurants in the state of Lower Austria, near Vienna, have closed, partly due to a rural exodus, with the coronavirus pan-

dem and resulting lockdown also taking their toll. So far, 20 restaurants have received the bonus. But critics have denounced the measure as discriminatory - an accusation rejected by the conservative People's Party (OeVP) state parliament member Kurt Hackl. "Village restaurants in Lower Austria are dying out, and we want to support them," he said, calling them "special".

'Our values'

At Gasthaus Stich - which also features regional wines and seasonal dishes such as chanterelles with dumplings - clubs from the community regularly hold their meetings there, and guests play cards on wooden tables. "In small communities, the tavern is the centre of social life. People celebrate, laugh and cry there together," said Oliver Fritz at the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO). However, Fritz considers the 10,000 euro subsidy as just a "drop in the ocean". He also warns of possible "windfall effects" for restaurant owners who do not really require the support. He also questioned why restaurants who offer pizza or kebabs should be excluded. "The social function works even if it is an Italian restaurant," he told AFP.

"If demand evolves and younger generations prefer to eat something else, then it's better to adjust, because countering a trend is extremely difficult," he said. Meanwhile, at the national level, Neham-



Gastronomer and inn owner Michael Stich poses with a plate of Schnitzel at the inn 'Gasthaus Stich'.

mer has tasked his integration minister with defining what "Leitkultur" means for the country of nine million people, which like the rest of the EU has seen an influx of migrants and asylum seekers. Under his "plan for Austria" launched early this year, Nehammer said that "Anyone who wants to live permanently in Austria must represent our values, accept our culture and adapt to our way of life". — AFP



A general view of a beach as sand is spread to protect against rising sea levels and erosion, in the tourist town of Hammamet, about 65 kilometers southeast of Tunisia's capital.



Fresh sand added to a beach in the tourist town of Hammamet. — AFP photos

Soldiers' gallows graffiti revealed for first time at English castle

Macabre depictions of hangings carved by soldiers guarding England's biggest medieval castle at a time of looming war with France went on display Monday. The graffiti-covered door - part of a new exhibition at Dover Castle on the country's south coast - dates from the late 18th century when soldiers garrisoned there faced the threat of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte's French forces. Historian Paul Pattison said scaling a ladder to the top floor of the castle's St John's Tower and seeing the carvings on the long-forgotten door had been an "astounding discovery".

He said the soldiers' fascination with public execution gave "a unique glimpse into the minds of these soldiers, especially during such a charged period of time". The door features some 50 pieces of carved graffiti including nine hangings, many initials and two surnames. There are also a number of dates including 1789, the year of the French Revolution, and 1798.

Pattison, a historian with English Heritage which manages Dover Castle, said the threat of impending invasion would have made strategically important Dover a hive of activity with ships filling the harbor and soldiers a constant presence. Dover is the closest port to continental Europe and has been a prime target for invaders down the centuries.

'Strange and macabre'

Researchers believe the "strange and macabre repetition" of hangings carved into the door could depict an actual execution in Dover where they would have provided a form of public entertainment during the late 18th century, attended by thousands of people. In one of the carvings, however, the figure is dressed in military uniform and

one of Napoleon's trademark two-cornered bicorne hats, making it possible it was intended to be the French military and political leader himself.

Also carved into the door is a detailed and accurate depiction of a single-masted sailing ship, thought to be an 8-gun cutter which was in use by Britain's Royal Navy at the time. "What makes this door such an extraordinary object is that it is a rare and precious example of the ordinary person making their mark, whether that be simply for the purpose of killing time or wanting to be remembered," Pattison added.

Dover Castle, which is now visited by more than 350,000 people a year, underwent a wide-ranging modernization in the 1790s to transform it from an ageing medieval castle into a modern military garrison. With the ultimately unrealized threat of an invasion from the other side of the Channel growing, it became home to thousands of soldiers.

St John's Tower, with its commanding view over the vulnerable northern end of the castle, would have been guarded by between six and 12 men at any one time, leaving them hours to kill time by carving graffiti with knives or possibly bayonets, according to English Heritage. The door has been painstakingly conserved and features in the castle's new "Dover Castle Under Siege" exhibition.

The exhibit delves back into the castle's bloody and dramatic 1216-17 siege when it repelled an attack by French and rebel English forces. Using digital reconstruction, it also reveals the fortress's original entrance from the time, multiple lost towers and long-lost defensive walls. — AFP



File photo shows Dover castle on a hill outside the town of Dover, southeast England. — AFP

Tunisia's sandy beaches eaten away by coastal erosion

In Tunisia's seaside town of Hammamet, bulldozers diligently shovel sand from a nearby desert onto a popular beach in an attempt to stop it from disappearing due to erosion. "This beach is the postcard image of Hammamet," said environmentalist Chihab Ben Fredj peering nostalgically at the town's iconic Yasmine beach. "It has been seared in our minds since our childhood," he added, as laborers worked to restore the central Tunisian waterfront to its former sandy glory.

Like many other coastal areas in North Africa, severe erosion has led to many of Hammamet's sandy beaches vanishing in recent years, taking a toll on the holiday hotspot about 65 kilometers (40 miles) east of the capital Tunis. Coastlines across the world are in a constant natural flux, with the seas claiming and depositing sediment. But human activity, including coastal property development and offshore sand mining, significantly accelerates beach erosion. Among other impacts, construction and coastal defenses in one area can stop sediment from travelling along a coastline, leaving existing beaches deprived of new material. Studies have also shown the impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures and sea levels, exacerbate the phenomenon.

Tourism draw

In the Mediterranean, where the British National Oceanography Centre says sea levels have risen at a higher rate over the past 20 years than the entirety of the 20th century, shorelines are changing rapidly. The sea is also warming 20 percent faster than the rest of the world, according to the United Nations. Tunisia's coastline has been a major asset for the

Mediterranean country with a struggling economy, as it aims to host some 10 million tourists this year.

Tourism accounts for up to 14 percent of the country's GDP, providing tens of thousands of jobs in a country where unemployment tops 16 percent and 40 percent among young people. Tunisia has already lost more than 90 kilometers of beaches to erosion, according to official figures from last year. Of the country's 570 kilometers of sandy beaches suitable for swimming, 190 kilometers are at imminent risk of disappearing, according to Tunisian reports.

A majority of the beaches most affected by erosion are located near cities. Tunisia's environmental groups, as well as the government's Coastal Protection and Development Agency (APAL), blame the rapid erosion mostly on human activity and construction on the coast, which they say is further aggravated by climate change. "Construction projects have not been designed to respect coastal dynamics," an APAL official told AFP.



A man looks on as a digger spreads sand on a beach in the tourist town of Hammamet.

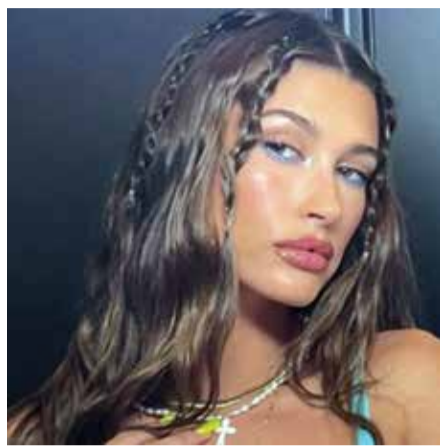
'Not sustainable'

To save the Hammamet beach, one of Tunisia's worst-affected according to the World Bank, authorities last month began trucking in around 750 lorry loads filled with sand from the inland desert province of Kairouan, about 110 kilometers away. APAL, which operates under the environment ministry, was in a race against time to refill the beach before the peak of tourist season. But while the rebuilding of beaches, known as beach nourishment, may be a quick fix, "it's not a sustainable solution", said Ben Fredj. "This sand may not last long," added the secretary general of the Environmental Education Association. "It can be swallowed in a few days in the event of a storm", he said, as was the case in the summer of 2023. The process can also prove expensive. Coastal authorities estimated the cost of restoring sand to three beaches in Hammamet, Monastir and Sfax at 3.9 million Tunisian dinars (\$1.25 million).

But for locals, restoring their priceless seafront is worth the money. The Yasmine beach "is a showcase for Hammamet," said Narjess Bouasker, who runs the town's Menara hotel and leads the regional hotel federation. "We must take back our beach that the sea has swallowed," she said, calling for a balance between safeguarding the landscape, cherished by locals and foreign visitors alike, and fighting coastal erosion. "For us, the priority is not to touch the beauty of the city," she said. Bouasker said she has seen increasing awareness among authorities, but refilling beaches with sand is still a gamble. "We don't know how the sea will react", she added. — AFP

Y2K series

THE Y2K BEAUTY RESURGENCE: A PLAYFUL RETURN TO MILLENNIUM MAKEUP



The early 2000s were a time of bold experimentation in the beauty world, with trends that defied the norms and embraced a futuristic yet playful aesthetic. Today, we witness a captivating resurgence of Y2K makeup trends, reinterpreted with a modern twist to suit the contemporary beauty enthusiast. This revival is not merely about bringing back the past; it's about celebrating the uniqueness of Y2K beauty while integrating today's advancements in makeup for a fresh, vibrant look that resonates across generations.

Y2K makeup was known for its distinctive features: glossy lips, brightly colored eyeshadows, and a generous application of body glitter. These elements are making a triumphant return, albeit with a nod to the subtleties of current beauty standards. The iconic glossy lip, for instance, is back on the scene, combining the nostalgia of the past with the enriched formulas of today that offer hydration and lasting shine without the stickiness of yesteryear's glosses.

Eyeshadows in the Y2K aesthetic boldly traversed the spectrum of the rainbow, with shades of electric blue, hot pink, and metallic silver. Today, these colors are being embraced once again but applied with a blend of modern techniques that allow for gradient effects and softer edges, making the look more



wearable and versatile for everyday life. Palettes inspired by the millennium provide both matte and shimmer options, encouraging makeup lovers to experiment and create looks that echo the past while fitting seamlessly into the present.

The era's fascination with glitter hasn't faded, with contemporary beauty brands reintroducing body glitters, highlighters, and shimmer eyeshadows that pay homage to Y2K's sparkle obsession. However, today's products are formulated for easier application and removal, and often with eco-friendly ingredients, reflecting a more conscious approach to beauty.



Another hallmark of Y2K makeup was the dramatic eyeliner, often applied in bold strokes or unconventional colors. This trend sees a revival with a variety of eyeliner styles available in a multitude of colors and finishes, from neon to metallic, allowing for creative expressions that range from graphic lines to smudged, smoky looks.

The resurgence of Y2K makeup is more than just a revival of bold and colorful aesthetics; it's a celebration of individuality and the joy of expression through makeup. It invites us to play with our looks, to embrace color and shine, and to make personal statements with



our beauty choices. As we explore this vibrant chapter of beauty history, we're reminded of the fearless spirit of the Y2K era, encouraging us to be bold, to experiment, and to have fun with our makeup, just as we did at the turn of the millennium.

Join us at Dashe Beauty on this journey to discover the essence of the Y2K Makeup trend. Get more inspiration by visiting our website <https://dashebeauty.com> or follow up on our beauty blog. — Dashe Beauty Kuwait.



Natural forest regrowth can be better than planting trees: Study

Countries have pledged to plant billions of trees to tackle climate change, but half the time letting forests regenerate naturally would be a better option, a major study said Wednesday. "There are places where it makes sense to plant trees, and there are places where it makes sense to naturally regenerate forests," Jacob Bukowski, one of the authors of the study told AFP. "If you want to sequester carbon at the lowest cost, some combination of natural regeneration and plantations makes a lot of sense," said the researcher at Oregon State University in the United States.

Restoring forests has massive potential to help limit rising global temperatures because trees absorb heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere. The study, which spanned 138 countries and was published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, compared the cost and climate benefits of planting one tree species in an area or allowing natural forest regrowth -- two common reforestation approaches -- over a 30-year period. It found that in 46 percent of the studied areas, letting forests grow back naturally was the more cost-effective option. The rest of the time, plantations were found to be cheaper.

'Missed opportunities'

"It suggests that the current heavier emphasis on plantations within national reforestation programs could be leading to missed opportunities for cost-effective climate mitigation," the study said. Previous research has shown that as much as two-thirds of reforestation commitments in the tropics are plantations, said Bukowski. In recent years there has been "a proliferation of single species plantations to try to meet climate goals," he added.

Fast-growing single species plantations -- also called monoculture -- are more costly to implement but provide revenue from the production and sale of wood products. When the wood is harvested, a portion of the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere -- but the rest is trapped in the timber.

Naturally regenerated forests grow more slowly but are more biodiverse and store a greater amount of carbon over a longer time period. The researchers said their mapping could help guide international initiatives and countries' plans to cut emissions by presenting a more nuanced approach to reforestation. They found that natural regeneration was especially cost-effective in much of western Mexico, the Andean region, the Southern Cone of South America, west and central Africa, India, southern China, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Conversely, plantations proved the better option in large parts of the Caribbean, Central America, Brazil, north, east and southern Africa, northern China, mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippines. — AFP



This combination of pictures shows (from left) US actor Brad Pitt in London, US singer-songwriter Lady Gaga in Las Vegas, US-Australian actress Nicole Kidman in Los Angeles, US actress Angelina Jolie in New York and US actor George Clooney in New York City. —AFP

Venice film fest unveils star-studded line-up

Stars including Angelina Jolie, Lady Gaga and Nicole Kidman are expected on the red carpet at Venice's film festival this year, with 21 films competing for the coveted Golden Lion, organizers said Tuesday. Hollywood pals George Clooney and Brad Pitt will also be on the Lido island in Venice's lagoon for the world's oldest movie festival, running from August 28 to September 7. The most hotly awaited films include "Joker: Folie a deux" by director Todd Phillips, the sequel to "Joker," once again starring Joaquin Phoenix -- but this time alongside Lady Gaga.

Other hot tickets are "Maria" by Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín, in which Jolie plays Greek soprano Maria Callas during her final days, and Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar's latest -- and his first film in English -- "The Room Next Door", starring Tilda Swinton and Julianne Moore. Kidman will star in "Babygirl", an erotic thriller by Dutch director Halina Reijn about a woman who swaps domestic boredom for a sadomasochistic relationship, while Jude Law plays an FBI agent in white supremacist circles in "The Order", by Australian Justin Kurzel.

In light relief, Clooney and Pitt star

as lone fixers forced to work together in out-of-competition action comedy "Wolfs" by American director Jon Watts. Five Italian films have made the cut, including "Queer", the latest by Luca Guadagnino, starring former James Bond actor Daniel Craig in what festival director Alberto Barbera said was "the performance of his life". Directors Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza are competing with "Sicilian Letters", inspired by the real-life story of Sicilian mafia boss and fugitive Matteo Messina Denaro, and starring Elio Germano, Barbara Bobulova and Toni Servillo.

The 81st edition of the festival will also mark the return of the Brazilian Walter Salles -- 12 years after his last film -- with "I'm Still Here", based on the true story of a woman searching for her husband during the dictatorship. The jury will be chaired this year by French actress Isabelle Huppert. The festival will open with the out-of-competition film "Beetlejuice Beetlejuice", the sequel to Tim Burton's iconic 1988 film, starring Michael Keaton, Winona Ryder, Willem Dafoe and Monica Bellucci. —AFP



Abdul Fakir of the group "The Four Tops" celebrates the life of songstress Aretha Franklin at a Tribute Concert at Cene Park on August 30, 2018 in Detroit, Michigan.



(From left) The Four Tops members, Lawrence Payton, Alex Morris, Lewis (Ronnie) McNeir, and Abdul "Duke" Fakir attend the Food Bank For New York City Can-Do Awards Dinner at Cipriani Wall Street on April 16, 2019 in New York City. —AFP photos

Abdul 'Duke' Fakir of The Four Tops dies at 88

Abdul "Duke" Fakir -- the last original member of the Four Tops, the Motown hitmakers behind classics like "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)" -- died Monday, US media said. He was 88 years old. Citing his family, the Detroit Free Press said Fakir died of heart failure at his home in Detroit. "Our hearts are heavy as we mourn the loss of a trailblazer, icon and music legend who, through his 70-year music career, touched the lives of so many as he continued to tour until the end of 2023, and officially retired this year," the family said in a statement to the paper. "As the last living founding member of the iconic Four Tops music group,

we find solace in Duke's legacy living on through his music for generations to come." The Four Tops' sound was elemental to 1960s pop, and the Motown group's additional chart-toppers included "Baby I Need Your Lovin'" "Reach Out, I'll Be There," "It's The Same Old Song" and "Standing In the Shadows of Love." The group -- who found success working with the storied songwriting team Holland-Dozier-Holland -- was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990, introduced into the pantheon by Stevie Wonder. Fakir, who was born in Detroit on December 26, 1935, sang first tenor. Originally founded as

the Four Aims, the group included Fakir as well as Levi Stubbs, Renaldo "Obie" Benson and Lawrence Payton. They performed together for more than 40 years, from 1953 to 1997. Between 1997 and 2005, Stubbs, Benson and Payton died. Fakir continued performing with new vocalists for many years, until medical issues forced him to stop in late 2023. "I'm not going to ever retire," he wrote in his 2022 memoir. "The Lord can retire me, but I'm not going into the dark night quietly. I know I'm not in the fourth quarter anymore." "I'm in overtime." — AFP

Lady Gaga in Paris, sparking Olympic opening ceremony rumors

Video of Lady Gaga in Paris just days before the start of the Olympic Games has sparked rumors the US pop star could feature in Friday's opening ceremony. The 38-year-old was seen arriving at a hotel in the French capital in videos posted on social media. The music for the opening ceremony, to be held along the river Seine rather than in the athletics stadium for the first time in the history of the Olympics, is yet to be fully announced.

Franco-Malian R&B star Aya Nakamura is widely tipped to perform despite criticism from far-right politicians, including Marine Le Pen who suggested an appearance by her would "humiliate" France. Celine Dion has also been spotted in Paris, fueling rumors she too could take part in either the opening or closing ceremony. —AFP



US singer-songwriter Lady Gaga performs on-stage during the 61st Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on February 10, 2019. — AFP

Sports

Salt Lake handed 2034 Winter Olympics after IOC warning

IOC awards 2030 Winter Olympics to French Alps 'under conditions'

PARIS: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the 2034 Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City on Wednesday but warned they could be stripped of the Games if US authorities kept up their feud with the World Anti-Doping Agency.

The success of Salt Lake City's bid was a foregone conclusion given the Utah city, which hosted the Games in 2002, was the only candidate to stage the winter sports spectacular. But in a dramatic twist shortly before members approved the bid by 83 votes to six, Olympic chiefs said the Games could be revoked if US lawmakers and the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) were not brought into line.

John Coates, the chairman of the IOC's legal commission, said the host city contract confirming Salt Lake's right to stage the Games had been altered to allow the IOC to remove the Games if US authorities did not respect the "supreme authority" of WADA.

Coates said it was "a must, and I stress the word must" for the US authorities to respect WADA. "The IOC has reinforced the current language of the Olympic host contract in order to protect the integrity of the international anti-doping system and to allow the IOC to terminate—to termi-

nate - the Olympic host contract in cases where the supreme authority of the World Anti-Doping Agency... is not fully respected or if the application of the World Anti-Doping code is hindered or undermined," Coates said.

USADA has been a vocal critic of WADA for much of the past decade, and those tensions have escalated this year after reports in April revealed that 23 Chinese swimmers had tested positive for a banned substance ahead of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, but were subsequently cleared to compete at the Games. USADA chief Travis Tygart accused WADA of covering up the cases, which China blamed on unintentional food contamination. WADA has angrily rejected the criticism from USADA, threatening legal action against the body.

Coates on Wednesday meanwhile said both the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and the state of Utah had agreed to the reworded host city contract. "We are committed to fostering WADA's authority as (it) is crucial for the opportunity to provide clean sport for athletes and give them confidence that they can be protected," USOPC chairman Gene Sykes said. "Our view is that this is of paramount importance and we take their concerns very seriously." — AFP



PARIS: The delegation from Salt Lake City pose for a picture with International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach (C) after winning the bid to host the 2034 Winter Games during the 142nd session of the IOC in Paris on July 24, 2024, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. — AFP

Five races to watch in the Olympic pool

PARIS: Nine days of Olympic swimming, in a temporary pool at the Paris La Defense Arena, begins on Saturday with 35 gold medals at stake. The powerhouse United States dominated three years ago in Tokyo, winning 30 medals, including 11 gold, ahead of Australia. But the Australians turned the tables at the 2023 world championships, winning more titles than their arch-rivals to set the scene for a titanic Olympic showdown. AFP Sport looks at five blockbuster races:

Women's 400m freestyle

The world record should be in play in one of the most anticipated clashes of the Games, with three swimmers at the height of their powers in the hunt. Australia's defending champion Ariarne Titmus will dive in as favorite after clocking the second-fastest time ever last month behind only her own 3min 55.38sec world best.

She stunned Katie Ledecky in an electric Tokyo final three years ago, with the American great gunning for revenge. Ledecky's best time this year is nearly three seconds slower than Titmus, but she can never be written off.

Men's 100m freestyle

American superstar Caeleb Dressel only finished third at the US trials and will not be defending his title, throwing the race wide open. Australian veteran Kyle Chalmers, the 2016 gold medalist who came second behind Dressel in Tokyo, has qualified, but will have to produce something special to fend off the next generation led by Chinese teenager Pan Zhanle.

Pan stunned the sport with a new world record (46.80sec) in February, with Romanian ex-world record holder and fellow 19-year-old David Popovici the only other man under 47 seconds this year.

Women's 100m backstroke

The world record has switched in recent years between American Regan Smith and Australian Kaylee McKeown. Smith lowered the mark in 2019 before McKeown bettered it in 2021 and again last year. McKeown fired a warning shot with the second-quickest time in history last month, only for Smith to sensationally respond by blitzing the world record again in 57.13 at the US trials.

Men's 100m breaststroke

British two-time Olympic champion Adam Peaty is looking to join Michael Phelps, who is currently the only man to win the same event at three, or more, consecutive Games. The only person to ever breach 57 seconds, the 29-year-old took time out in 2023 to deal with mental health issues before storming back with the year's fastest time in April.

But there is a crowded field gunning to dethrone him, led by China's Qin Haiyang, who won all three breaststroke events at the 2023 world championships, where he set a new 200m world record. Qin is reportedly one of 23 Chinese swimmers implicated in a major doping scandal.

Men's 400m medley

Leon Marchand is France's big home hope and nowhere more so than in the 400m medley after his sizzling 4:02.50 last year shattered Michael Phelps' 15-year-old world record. The 22-year-old, trained by Phelps' old coach Bob Bowman, is under huge pressure to live up to expectations and must raise his game after failing to go under 4:10 this year as a number of others have done so.

Key competition comes from Americans Carson Foster and Chase Kalisz, Britain's Max Lichfield and New Zealand's Lewis Clareburt. A five-time world champion, Marchand will also be heavy favorite in the 200m medley and 200m butterfly as he bids to cement a burgeoning reputation. — AFP

Spain, new-look USA top women's football billing

PARIS: A rejuvenated United States team under new coach Emma Hayes are targeting a record-extending fifth women's football gold medal at the Paris Olympics but face stiff competition, not least in the shape of World Cup holders Spain and their all-star line-up.

The USA just about remain the biggest draw in women's soccer despite disappointing recent results and the departures of several veteran stars. They won gold when women's football was introduced to the Olympics in 1996, and won three in a row in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

But they exited in the quarter-finals in 2016 and settled for bronze three years ago in Tokyo after losing to eventual champions Canada in the semis. That was followed by a shock last-16 exit at the World Cup a year ago in Australia and New Zealand, a disappointing end to the iconic Megan Rapinoe's international career and an outcome that precipitated the exit of coach Vlatko Andonovski.

They come to Paris under the leadership of English former Chelsea boss Hayes, probably the outstanding female coach in the sport. She made a striking decision when naming her squad for the Games by choosing to leave out Alex Morgan, one of the leading players in the sides that won the 2015 and 2019 World Cups but now in her twilight years at the age of 35.

"It was a tough decision of course...especially considering Alex's history and record with this team,

Dujardin video shows star repeatedly whipping horse

PARIS: Video has emerged of British Olympic dressage star Charlotte Dujardin repeatedly whipping a horse's legs after she was suspended by the sport's governing body. The three-time gold medalist, the joint most-decorated British female Olympian, withdrew from the Paris Games on Tuesday over the footage showing her making an "error of judgement".

The International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI) suspended Dujardin just days before the start of the Olympics. The governing body said it had received a video "depicting Ms Dujardin engaging in conduct contrary to the principles of horse welfare".

The footage shows Dujardin using a whip multiple times to strike the legs of a horse during what appears to be a training session at a stable. "The FEI has officially announced the provisional suspension of British Dressage athlete Charlotte Dujardin effective immediately from the date of notification, 23 July 2024," it said in a statement on Tuesday.

"This decision renders her ineligible to participate in the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games or any other events under the jurisdiction of the FEI." The FEI said the video was submitted to it by an "undisclosed complainant".

"According to the information received, the footage was allegedly taken several years ago during

'We love life': Gaza's war-weary footballers play on

JABALIA: On an improvised pitch in war-ravaged Gaza, a young player and goalkeeper block out the boisterous crowd and focus solely on the football as they square off. The referee blows the whistle and the penalty-taker fires the ball into the makeshift goal, sparking wild celebrations as spectators swarm him.

For fans and players, Tuesday's match in the Jabalia refugee camp was a welcome distraction from the pangs of hunger and exhaustion endured over nearly 300 days of the Zionist-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. Referee Rami Mustafa Abu Hashish told AFP that



Aitana Bonmati

but I felt I wanted to go in another direction and selected other players," said Hayes. It is a younger USA squad now, although players like Trinity Rodman and Sophia Smith will benefit from the experience garnered at the World Cup.

Experience is still there, too, notably in the shape of Lindsey Horan and Rose Lavelle, members of the side that won the World Cup in France in 2019. The USA are in a difficult Group B with Germany, Australia and a Zambia team who are outsiders but boast exciting forwards in Barbra Banda and Racheal Kundananji. The format—with 12 teams in three groups of four—means the two best third-placed sides advance to the quarter-finals, providing a safety net in the event of slip-ups.

a training session conducted by Ms Dujardin at a private stable," it said. The governing body said Dujardin had confirmed she was depicted in the video and had acknowledged that her conduct was "inappropriate".

"Charlotte Dujardin requested to be provisionally suspended pending the outcome of the investigations and voluntarily withdrew from the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and also confirmed that she will not participate in any competitions pending the outcome of the FEI's investigation," it said.

"The FEI condemns any conduct contrary to the welfare of horses and has robust rules in place to address such behavior."

'Error of judgement'

Earlier Tuesday, Dujardin said a video had emerged from four years ago showing "an error of judgement during a coaching session". "Understandably, the International Federation for Equestrian Sports is investigating and I have made the decision to withdraw from all competition—including the Paris Olympics—while this process takes place," she said.

"What happened was completely out of character and does not reflect how I train my horses or coach my pupils. However, there is no excuse. I am deeply ashamed and should have set a better example in that moment."

FEI president Ingmar De Vos said: "We are deeply disappointed with this case, especially as we approach the Olympic Games in Paris 2024. "However, it is our responsibility and crucial that we address any instances of abuse, as equine welfare cannot be compromised.

football helped "restore a semblance of life" to Jabalia, devastated by Israeli bombardments and fighting which have laid waste to schools, stadiums and homes, and uprooted families many times over.

In the courtyard of a school-turned-shelter, the two sides vied for a trophy one player said was salvaged from the rubble. The game created a festive atmosphere, with spectators pulling out chairs and leaning over the railings of the three-storey compound to cheer.

A group of boys packed onto an empty lorry bed for a better view. "We will play despite hunger and thirst, we will compete because we love life," read one child's sign in both English and Arabic.

'Something out of nothing'

Jabalia was hit particularly hard in an Israeli offensive launched in May, part of a fierce campaign sweeping northern Gaza—an area the military had

Bonmati aims big

Germany, gold medalist in 2016, will aim to bounce back from their group-stage exit at the World Cup but have lost key midfielder Lena Oberdorf to injury. Australia are hoping to build on their run to the semi-finals in that World Cup on home soil, yet they are missing Sam Kerr, their captain, as she recovers from an ACL injury. Spain, in Group C with Japan, Nigeria and Brazil, will take some beating as they arrive in Paris with the stars who led them to World Cup glory 11 months ago. Ballon d'Or winner Aitana Bonmati, Alexia Putellas and Salma Paralluelo are the standouts in a superb side that also won the UEFA Women's Nations League this year and are now making their Olympic debut.

"I'm sure lots of people and lots of teams see us as favorites, but this competition is a bit different," Bonmati told Marca. "We play lots of matches in a short space of time, and against good sides, so it will be very difficult. But obviously we have the maximum ambition and are going for gold."

Spain kick off against 2012 silver medalists Japan, whose side includes Hinata Miyazawa, top scorer at the World Cup. Nigeria are the top-ranked African nation, while Brazil are two-time silver medalists and hope to contend again in legendary forward Marta's sixth Olympics at the age of 38.

France, meanwhile, are aiming big on home soil as they face reigning Olympic champions Canada, New Zealand and the Colombia of teenage sensation Linda Caicedo in Group A. "The objective, like that of every French athlete, is to win a medal. It won't be easy, but it has to be the aim," said coach Herve Renard, who will leave after the tournament which begins on Thursday and runs until August 10.

Games will be played around France, with the semi-finals in Lyon and Marseille. However, the gold-medal match will be in Paris. — AFP



TOKYO: (FILES) Britain's Charlotte Dujardin riding Gio reacts after competing in the dressage grand prix special team competition during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Equestrian Park in Tokyo on July 27, 2021. — AFP

"Charlotte has expressed genuine remorse for her actions, and we recognize and appreciate her willingness to take responsibility." Dujardin was eliminated from the European Championships in 2019 after blood was found on her horse, Mount St John Freestyle, in a post-competition check. — AFP

previously said was out of the control of Hamas militants. As fighting rages, humanitarian agencies struggle to deliver aid and warn of a looming famine.

Residents have told AFP there is barely any food left in the north, and what little reaches them comes at an astronomical cost. For the footballers, the match offered a rare escape from concerns about food and water shortages.

They have been unable to play since the October 7 outbreak of the war triggered by Hamas's attacks, which resulted in the deaths of 1,197 people in Zionist entity, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Militants also seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 44 the army says are dead. Zionist's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 39,145 Palestinians, also mostly civilians, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. — AFP

Sports

Snipers, divers and AI: Securing the Paris Olympics opening ceremony

An assassination attempt on Donald Trump on July 14 helped focus minds

PARIS: On the water, perched on rooftops and operating AI-augmented cameras, French security forces will lock down central Paris during the opening ceremony of the Olympics on Friday aiming to prevent an incident that would ruin the biggest show on earth.

The figures tell only part of the story of the colossal effort made to protect the river parade along the Seine, the first time a Summer Olympics has started outside a stadium. About 45,000 police and paramilitary officers will be on duty, along with 10,000 soldiers and 20,000 private security guards.

The total area that needs securing measures more than six kilometres (four miles) along the Seine and will contain around 300,000 ticketed spectators, as well as hundreds of thousands of other residents and tourists in overlooking buildings.

A no-fly zone 150 kilometres wide around Paris will be enforced an hour before the ceremony starts at 7:30 pm (1730 GMT), grounding or diverting all aviation at one of Europe's busiest airport hubs. "This opening ceremony is the most extraordinary thing a country can do," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told BFM television on Wednesday, adding: "As you know, in the current context of geopolitics and terrorism, it's an enormous challenge."

The amount of specialized equipment and personnel illustrates the difficulty of securing such a risky environment - an open-air site with fast-flowing water, overlooked by hundreds of buildings. All at a time when France is on its maximum alert for terror attacks. "Security of 100 percent does not exist," Frederic Pechenard, a former head of the French police force, told AFP. "The bigger and more difficult and complex a site is, the higher the risks are."

Fortress

Police snipers are set to be positioned on every high point along the route, scanning for potential shooters. An assassination attempt on US presidential candidate Donald Trump on July 14 helped focus minds.

Navy boats with divers and sonar have been scanning the depths of the water for explosives or infiltration attempts, while all of the 85 boats in the parade and others moored along the route have been screened by sniffer dogs and bomb disposal experts.

River traffic will be stopped in both directions, with barriers installed and nets that can be dropped to the bottom of the waterway if necessary. The Seine concept for the opening ceremony was at first resisted by some senior security officials and described by renowned French criminologist Alain Bauer as "criminal madness" in 2022. The initial plans - of having up to a million spectators by the river - have though since been scaled back.

"The risks have not changed and have become worse because of the war in Ukraine, the situation in (the Zionist entity) and Gaza as well as social, environmental and political tensions in France," Bauer told AFP. "It's a beautiful idea but it has a cost and considerable consequences."

Since last week, central Paris has been turned into a fortress, with metal barriers sealing off both banks of the Seine. Only residents and people with hotel bookings are allowed into the high-security area. The French army is set to be in charge of anti-drone operations, using the country's most sophisticated electronic warfare technology.

"Drones are now a real risk and that's why measures have been taken," said Jean-Michel Fauvergue, former head of the police commando unit RAID. Drones operated by security forces will also be a key tool to monitor suspicious activity, while AI-augmented cameras - new technology being deployed controversially in France for the first time - will scan the crowds.

Tensions

France has been a frequent target of Islamist terror groups over the last decade, with attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine, the Bataclan concert hall



PARIS: French CRS riot police stand guard near the Parc des Princes ahead of the men's group C football match between Uzbekistan and Spain, during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in Paris on July 24, 2024. — AFP

and the national stadium, which will used for athletics during the Games.

An offshoot of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan was said by President Emmanuel Macron to be planning attacks against France in March and IS-affiliated social media accounts have issued regular threats.

Four suspects believed to be plotting attacks against the Games have been arrested, Darmanin said on Wednesday. The international context, particularly the war in Gaza, have heightened fears. "If

you look at the history of Islamist terror attacks, you see that every time there is tension, a foreign war, then there are consequences in our country," Pechenard, the former head of police, said.

Fauvergue said French forces could be counted on and recalled being head of the police commando unit during the Euro 2016 football tournament, hosted by France, as the continent faced a series of suicide bombings. "The threat was high but the Euros were maintained and we didn't have an attack," he said. — AFP

Jacobs, the much-maligned 100m champion

PARIS: Rarely has an Olympic 100 metres champion been so belittled or so maligned as Italy's Marcell Jacobs. It is fair to say the Texas-born Italian stunned the field to snatch gold in the COVID-delayed Tokyo Games, in a European record of 9.80sec.

He made it double gold just days later by helping Italy to victory in the 4x100m relay, again a result that left pundits shocked and opened up a Pandora's box of questions.

A former long jumper, Jacobs had vastly improved his 100m times that season under then-coach Paolo Camossi. Before 2020, Jacobs had never gone below the 10-second barrier and his sole title of note was European indoor 60m gold.

But after his stunning success in Tokyo, Jacobs went off the radar, pulling out of the high-profile Eugene, Brussels and Zurich Diamond League meets, citing fatigue and a knee problem. His conspicuous absence raised eyebrows. Being the men's Olympic 100m champion carries a kudos, attracting meet organizers and sponsors alike and to go AWOL didn't chime well with traditionalists.

"I'm not even bothered by the gratuitous malice about doping," the 29-year-old said in September 2021 of insinuations that his success was partly fuelled by performance-enhancing drugs. Jacobs may have temporarily disappeared off the



Marcell Jacobs

track scene, but he bounced back in style, claiming the world indoor 60m crown and a first European 100m gold in 2022.

A series of injuries ensued that saw him withdraw from the semi-finals of the 2022 world outdoor championships in Eugene with a thigh injury while he didn't qualify for the final at last year's worlds in Budapest.

"People's criticism really hit me hard," he told the Guardian newspaper. "It came from everywhere - from Italy and abroad. As if I wasn't competing because I was afraid. 'I've never been afraid of anything in my life. I wasn't competing because I wasn't able to. It was a difficult time because you train to get results and not getting them was hard. The two post-Olympic years were difficult years."

"I think there was a lot of shock and discomfort with an Italian winning 100m gold," Jacobs showed his resolve by upending his life, both professional-

have to wait until the Paris Olympics, he said. The 400m hurdles has taken on a life of its own after a surge of interest following a massive jump in rivalries and times recorded in what is widely regarded as one of the most testing disciplines in track and field.

Warholm told AFP that there had been a "revolution" in the event, and not just in the male category. The women's hurdles has been lit up by the rivalry between American Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone and Dutch star Femke Bol, now two of the most recognizable and sought-after faces on the circuit. The Norwegian himself faces stiff competition from Brazil's world champion Alison Dos Santos and American Rai Benjamin, two proven competitors guaranteed to bring the best out of Warholm. Dos Santos scored a recent psychological blow by edging Warholm on his home track in Oslo during the Bislett Games earlier this month. Benjamin then won in Monaco earlier this month, Warholm and Dos Santos rounding out that podium in the trio's first race together since they finished medalists at the Tokyo Olympics.

The 400m hurdles at the Paris Games, Warholm

ly and personally, changing coach in Olympic year and moving, with his family, to the United States to work under Rana Reider.

It has seemingly paid off as Jacobs claimed a second European title on his home track in Rome in June. "I had three goals: health, defending the European title and then the Olympic one," Jacobs said after that victory.

Jacobs dipped under 10 seconds for the first time this season in Turku last month, clocking 9.92sec to take the 100m win at the Paavo Nurmen Games, having timed 9.99sec in the heats. His final winning time was his fastest in competition since his Tokyo gold.

"I was a bit worried that I hadn't run under 10 seconds yet (this season), but it's part of the game and now I have done it twice," said Jacobs.

Back on track

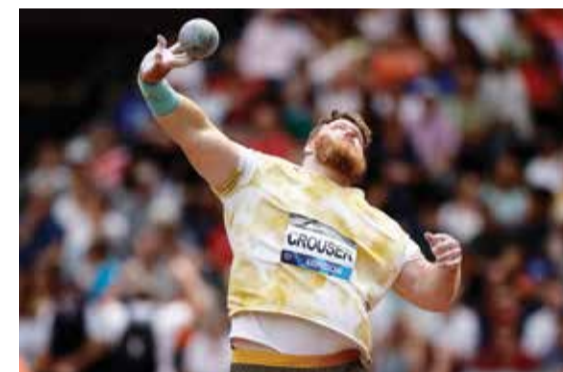
The Italian now seems on the right trajectory heading into the Paris Olympics. "He's definitely one of the top guys I really like," US track and field legend Carl Lewis told AFP of Jacobs. The question now is whether Jacobs, born in Texas to a US military father and Italian mother and raised solely by his mother in Rome from an early age, can spring a second surprise by taking back-to-back Olympic golds.

"Winning a second gold wouldn't make that much of a change to me and my image," Jacobs insisted. "Of course it would be positive, but coming from a country where no one before me had won an Olympic gold medal in the 100m, what I did was historic and it will always be historic. "Over the years I've learned that I have to focus on what I want and what I believe I can do. Not to show others, but to show myself. A lot of things have happened in the two and a half years since I won gold, so I need to show myself what I can do." — AFP



Karsten Warholm

said, "should be one of the most exciting races. It's building up to that. It will be exciting". "It's good to see the level is moving," said Warholm, known for his extremely rapid starts, a tactic he argues is behind many racers' improvement. — AFP



LONDON: USA's Ryan Crouser competes in the Men's shot put event during the IAAF Diamond League athletics meeting at the London stadium in London on July 20, 2024. — AFP

Ryan Crouser set for his shot at Olympic history

PARIS: Ryan Crouser likes making history, whether by breaking decades-old world records or Olympic landmarks, and the genial American can post a new first in Paris by becoming the only three-time Olympic shot put champion. The 31-year-old will enter the Games on the back of three injuries and finishing second to European champion Leonardo Fabri in the final Diamond League meet, in London, before Paris but he can never be discounted.

Last year was a case in point as he won his third world outdoor title, twice breaking the championship record. That was despite lacking proper training and preparation due to a deep vein thrombosis uncovered 20 days before the showpiece event. He labelled it the "best performance of his life". That is some statement given at the 2016 Rio Games he broke Ulf Timmermann's 28-year-old Olympic record and in the 2021 Olympic trials set a new world record of 23.37 metres - he has since improved it to 23.56m - erasing Randy Barnes' name from the record books after 31 years.

Crouser hails from a family of throwers. Generally to be seen wearing a stetson - a habit from the Oregon native's university days in Texas - he has taken the event onto another plane. World Athletics president Sebastian Coe has been purring about the shot, saying since 2019 it has been compulsive viewing.

Crouser may have been raised in a town called Boring but the opposite could be said of his sporting career. Having toyed with basketball, Crouser may have felt he owed it to his late grandfather Larry to opt for the shot after he launched one effort so far as a youngster it went through the roof of his shed. Korean War veteran Larry would chain smoke while his grandson practiced in his garden. — AFP

Classifieds

Change of Name

I, Moin Khan, holder of Indian Aadhar card no. 368209366721, Sataya beldan pos, Aadaapur satawa Nalanda, Bihar - 803109, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that I have changed my name from Moin Khan to Mohammed Moiz Khan (given name) and Khan (surname).

(#5637, 24/7/2024)

I, Farhad Moin Khan, holder of Indian passport no. W0774163, H.NO. 244/02, Sharmik Nagar, Khairane midc near Yedekar Masala Company, Mahape, Navi Mumbai - pin: 400710 Maharashtra, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that I have changed my name from Farhad Moin Khan to Mohammed Farhad Khan (given name) and Khan (surname).

(#5638, 24/7/2024)

I, Raju Upputuru, holder of Indian Passport No. P1095315 having permanent address 9 34 A Rajampet Kadapa Andhra Pradesh 516115, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: (given name) Subbarayudu and (surname) Upputuru.

(#5636, 23/07/2024)

I, Murtaza (current name in passport) holder of Indian Passport No. M7068737 having permanent address - Mohammadiyah Colony, Post - Gallyakot, Dungarpur, Rajasthan, Pincode No. 314026 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth in future my name will be read as (given name) Murtaza and (surname) Tapiya.

(#5635, 23/07/2024)

Booed Argentina snatch draw, Spain win Olympic men's football opener

Argentina looking to win men's football gold for third time



SAINT-ETIENNE: Argentina's midfielder #10 Thiago Almada (2nd L) attempts to tackle Morocco's forward #07 Eliesse Ben Seghir (R) in the men's group B football match between Argentina and Morocco during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Geoffroy-Guichard Stadium in Saint-Etienne on July 24, 2024. — AFP

PARIS: Cristian Medina scored the equalizer in the 16th added minute as Argentina came from two down to draw 2-2 with Morocco in a hostile atmosphere on the opening day of men's Olympic football on Wednesday, while Spain edged Uzbekistan 2-1. Argentina are looking to win men's football gold for the third time after success in 2004 and 2008, but Javier Mascherano's side came within seconds of defeat in Saint-Etienne.

They were booed as they emerged onto the pitch and during the national anthems by the crowd, the majority of whom were supporting Morocco. That welcome came after Argentina players were filmed singing racist chants following their victory in the recent Copa America. Argentina trailed 2-0 in the Group B game to a Soufiane Rahimi brace but pulled one back through Giuliano Simeone before Medina finished off a crazy move right at the death.

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi, the Paris Saint-Germain full-back who is one of the biggest

names featuring in the tournament, set up Rahimi for the opener at the end of a fine move in first-half stoppage time. The reigning African Under-23 champions doubled their lead six minutes into the second half from the penalty spot. UAE-based forward Rahimi stroking in the spot-kick after Ilias Akhouchane was brought down.

Argentina coach Mascherano, who starred in the teams that won gold in Athens and Beijing, had at one point hoped to persuade Lionel Messi to feature among the three permitted overage players in his squad otherwise limited to those under 23. Messi opted not to come to the Paris Games, and the biggest names in their side here were Manchester City striker Julian Alvarez and captain Nicolas Otamendi, the Benfica defender. Simeone, son of former Argentina star Diego, came off the bench to pull one back midway through the second half, and Medina saved a point in the 106th minute.

Otamendi's shot was turned onto the bar by

the goalkeeper and Bruno Amione headed the follow-up off the woodwork, but Medina was on hand to make it third time lucky and secure a draw. As Argentina celebrated, projectiles including bottles and plastic cups rained down from the stands, and several spectators entered the pitch, with the referee promptly blowing for full-time. Group B rivals Iraq and Ukraine meet later in Lyon.

Gomez makes amends

Silver medallists in Tokyo three years ago, Spain were made to work hard to beat Uzbekistan in their Group C opener at the Parc des Princes in Paris. FIFA president Gianni Infantino was among the spectators watching a Spain side featuring two members of their Euro 2024-winning squad in Alex Baena and Fermin Lopez. Spain went ahead just before the half-hour mark when Sergio Gomez's free-kick was helped on by Abel Ruiz to the back post where Marc Pubill turned the ball in. Uzbekistan

had chances and drew level from the penalty spot in first-half added time. Pau Cubarsi was penalized for a foul in the box following a VAR review and Uzbekistan captain Eldor Shomurodov, the Roma forward, converted the penalty. Cubarsi, the 17-year-old Barcelona prodigy, had been booked early on and did not reappear for the second half.

Spain got a penalty of their own for a foul on Aimar Oroz, but Gomez's kick was saved by goalkeeper Abduvohid Nematov. However, Gomez made up for that by grabbing what proved to be the winner just after the hour. Juan Miranda cut the ball back for Gomez - who has just joined Real Sociedad from Manchester City - to fire in. Also in Group C are Egypt and the Dominican Republic. The pick of Wednesday's later games sees hosts France face the United States in Marseille in Group A, with Thierry Henry's team hoping to win a medal despite failing in their attempts to enrol the services of Kylian Mbappe. — AFP

Favorites France held in rugby sevens opener, Fiji sparkle

PARIS: France struggled to live up to pre-tournament billing as favorites for Olympic Gold in rugby sevens Wednesday, held to a 12-12 draw by the United States to the disappointment of a packed Stade de France.

Meanwhile, double Olympic champions Fiji burnished their own title credentials, swatting aside Uruguay 40-12 with typical Fijian flair and rugby superpower New Zealand also impressed. The hosts featuring Antoine Dupont, arguably the world's greatest 15-a-side player, were left to rue several errors in possession that opened the door for their lesser-ranked opponents.

France opened their account halfway through the first half, a brilliant offload out of contact releasing Jordan Sepho for a try in the corner. But the home crowd was stunned into silence just before the half-time whistle as US flyer Lucas Lacamp broke through the French defence for a long-range effort that earned his team a 7-5 lead at the break.

France restored their advantage practically from the kick-off in the second half. Rayan Rebbadj powering over after a move that started with a clever Dupont offload. But a powerful American counter-ruck after France were caught isolated deep in their half allowed Marcus Tupuola to stroll in for a try that se-



SAINT-DENIS: Uruguay's Tomas Etcheverry (C) passes the ball as he is marked by Fiji's Ponipate Loganimasi (L) and Fiji's Jeremaia Matana (R) during the men's pool C rugby sevens match between Fiji and Uruguay during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on July 24, 2024. — AFP

cured them a deserved draw.

"We lacked precision, especially close to the try line. We were knocked back a lot, especially at the start of the match," said France captain Paulin Riva. "We didn't manage to finish, messed up every time we should have finished," he added. The result blows

open pool C, which also features Fiji, always a force in sevens despite a disappointing season by their standards. With trademark free-flowing rugby, the Fijians had far too much pace and power for Uruguay, a Joji Nasova first-half double killing off the match as a contest before the break. — AFP

Canada football staff sent home over drone scandal

PARIS: An assistant coach and an analyst with the Canadian women's football team were on Wednesday sent home from the Olympics for their part in a spying scandal. Head coach Bev Priestman also announced she will take no part in the opening game of Canada's gold medal defence, against New Zealand.

The decisions come after a staff member was detained by French authorities for flying a drone over a New Zealand training session this week in Saint-Etienne. The Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) said it had since learned of a second incident involving New Zealand, which formally lodged a complaint with the IOC integrity unit and demanded answers from Canada.

"The COC is in contact with the IOC and in contact with FIFA. Canada Soccer has been transparent and cooperative throughout the process," the COC said. "The COC will continue to review this matter and may take further action if necessary." It named the staff members sent home as Joseph Lombardi, an unaccredited analyst with Canada Soccer, and Jasmine Mander, an assistant coach to whom Lombardi reported. Priestman said she did not think it would be appropriate to be on the bench for the clash against New Zealand on Thursday. "On behalf of our entire team, I first and foremost want to apologize to the players and staff at New Zealand Football and to the players on Team Canada," she said. "This does not represent the values that our team stands for. — AFP