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30 killed as Zionists hit school

Mideast escalations take terrible turn



PARIS: Kuwait's delegation sails on a boat during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on July 26, 2024. — AFP

Kuwaitis urged to cheer athletes at Paris Olympics

PARIS: Minister of State for Youth Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah appealed to Kuwaitis to cheer on their compatriots during the 2024 Summer Olympic Games that kicked off on Friday in the French capital Paris. Leading the Kuwaiti delegation, Al-Huwailah, also Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, made the statement to KUNA. The Kuwait Olympic Committee is partaking in this global event with nine male and female athletes in a number of contests, including swimming, rowing, fencing, sailing and shooting, she pointed out.

Praising Kuwait's participation in the global tournament, which continues until August 11, Al-Huwailah underlined the resolve of Kuwaiti athletes. Kuwait took part in the Olympic Games 14 times, starting with Mexico in 1968, while 1980 Moscow Olympics



Minister of State for Youth Affairs Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah with Kuwait's athletes. — KUNA

saw the participation of 56 athletes; the highest in Kuwait's history so far. Athens 2004 witnessed Kuwaiti females' participation for the first time.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed that Kuwait's participation in

the Paris Olympics is the fruit of ongoing support by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for sports. Sheikh Fahad Nasser expressed deep appreciation for Kuwaiti leaders. — KUNA

GAZA: The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said a Zionist airstrike on a school killed 30 people on Saturday, after a days-long military operation further south left around 170 dead, according to emergency services. The latest strike, which Zionists said targeted "terrorists", was at least the eighth time since July 6 a school has been hit, leaving a total of more than 100 people dead, based on figures given by the health ministry and a hospital source.

With most of the Gaza Strip's 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war started by Hamas's October 7 attack, many have sought refuge in school buildings including the one hit on Saturday. The Health Ministry reported "30 martyrs and more than 100 wounded" in the strike on Khadija school in the central Deir El-Balah area. Zionist military said Palestinian militants were using the compound as a "hiding place".

Further south, in the Khan Yunis city area, around 170 people have been killed "and hundreds wounded" in an operation since Monday, Gaza's civil defense agency said. It issued the toll after the military warned of new operations in the Khan Yunis area, where troops had earlier recovered the bodies of five people killed during the October 7 attack. Egyptian state-linked media said Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators are to meet with Zionist negotiators in Rome on Sunday in the latest push for a Gaza truce, which critics of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have accused him of blocking.

Aid effort 'destabilized'

Zionists had warned on Monday that its forces would "forcefully operate" in the Khan Yunis area. On Saturday, the military ordered residents from more parts of Khan Yunis "to temporarily evacuate to the adjusted humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi" - the second such change to the declared safe zone within a week. The United Nations said that by Thursday, more than 180,000 Palestinians had already fled fierce fighting there.

Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defense agency, told AFP that many people had been displaced again on Saturday as the operation continued. But with large parts of Khan Yunis "not suitable for living" and "no other options available", civilians have struggled to find safety, he said. The evacuation orders and "intensified hostilities" have "significantly destabilized aid operations", the UN said, reporting "dire water, hygiene and sanitation conditions" in the Palestinian territory.

Khan Yunis was left devastated after heavy fighting early in the year but the military withdrew in April

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22 killed in Sudan

PORT SUDAN: Besieging Sudanese paramilitary forces pounded El-Fasher on Saturday, witnesses said, killing 22 people in Darfur's last city outside their control, according to a hospital source. El-Fasher has become a key battleground in the 15-month-long war pitting the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) against the regular army. The battle for the North Darfur state capital, seen as crucial for humanitarian aid in a region on the brink of famine, has raged for more than two months.

Witnesses said El-Fasher had come under heavy artillery bombardment by the RSF on Saturday. "Some houses were destroyed by the shelling," one witness said. A doctor at the city's Saudi Hospital told AFP on condition of anonymity that "bombardment of the livestock market and the Redayef neighborhood killed 22 people and

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Palestinian Olympian wears shirt showing bombed children

PARIS: Palestinian boxer Waseem Abu Sal wore a shirt depicting children being bombed for the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in a test for organizers who have strict rules on political statements. Abu Sal was one of two flag-bearers for the Palestinian delegation during the rain-soaked river parade along the Seine on Friday. His white shirt had embroidered

Trump accuses Harris of anti-Semitism in overblown speech

WEST PALM BEACH: US presidential candidate Donald Trump falsely accused election rival Kamala Harris of being an anti-Semite who plans to allow the murder of newborn babies, in a speech meant to rally religious supporters that quickly went off the rails. The vice president, who is married to a Jewish man, has gained ground on Trump in polling since she re-

images of warplanes dropping missiles over children playing sport.

"This shirt represents the current image in Palestine," Abu Sal told AFP on Saturday. "The children who are martyred and die under the rubble, children whose parents are martyred and are left alone without food or water." At least 39,258 people have been killed in Gaza since Zionists launched a military campaign in retaliation for the October 7 attacks by Hamas militants, according to figures from the Hamas-run health ministry.

Jibril Rajoub, president of the Palestine Olympic Committee, told AFP they had checked with the local organizing committee of the Paris Olympics to see if

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placed Joe Biden on the top of the Democratic ticket just days ago.

Former Republican president Trump dedicated much of his address at a religious convention in southern Florida to assailing Harris's record as a senator and as Biden's number two, but many of his attacks were smeared un tethered to reality. Explaining why 59-year-old Harris had skipped Zionist Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress on Wednesday to instead honor a prior commitment, Trump accused her, baselessly, of anti-Semitism. "She doesn't like Jewish people. She doesn't like (Zionist entity). That's the way it is, and that's the way it's always going to be. She's not going to change," he said.



Palestinian boxer Waseem Abu Sal

The remark - coupled with his claim that Harris "is totally against the Jewish people" in North Carolina on Wednesday - marked an escalation in Trump's incendiary rhetoric, days after his campaign said an attempt on his life had given him a focus on unity. The hour-long Friday speech, hosted by hard-right Turning Point Action, raised legitimate questions over Harris's previous statements on policing, immigration and the environment that placed her to the left of current Biden administration policy. But it was marked by hyperbole and falsehood.

Trump - a convicted felon who is fighting multiple further indictments - suggested baselessly that the Justice Department and FBI were "rounding up"

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Local

Disorganized bus network behind lacking transit system

Activist, passengers call for centralized system with regular timings, new routes

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Kuwait's poorly organized bus network counts as the primary obstacle to improving the country's public transit over the past 40 years, says Jassim Al-Awadhi, Founder of the Kuwait Commute Initiative. He specifically stated that regulating bus stops is crucial for ensuring a more effective and comfortable transit experience.

Awadhi's remarks followed the latest meeting between the Ministry of Interior and the Supreme Council for Traffic, which focused on enhancing public transportation in Kuwait. The discussions covered various strategies to improve traffic flow, including proposals for better road infrastructure and the possibility of increasing traffic fines to manage congestion more effectively.

One of the main causes behind the issue of congestion, said Awadhi, is a shortage of bus stops within a well-organized public transit network, causing buses to operate randomly. The status quo has resulted in limited bus coverage, confusion on the roads, traffic jams, and delays.

Awadhi's sentiments were echoed by Jumannah, a resident in Kuwait. "We need better routes! It's beyond me why we have to spend an hour on some routes to reach a destination that should only take 20 minutes," she said. "Kuwait is such a small country. Rerouting is essential to save everyone's time," she wrote in a comment on a social media post about the latest governmental meeting.

To solve the problem at its core, Awadhi has proposed a "bus loop system." This system organizes bus routes into a circular pattern, with buses starting and ending at the same point — for example, a bus

with a route beginning in Kuwait City would end its journey at the same location. Awadhi noted that the Kuwait Commute has presented this proposal to several governmental institutions, including the Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry for Cabinet Affairs. Additionally, the proposal was discussed during a meeting with the Supreme Council for Traffic.

If implemented, Awadhi believes the system will offer several benefits for passengers. For one, it will provide more frequent bus stops within a cohesive network. The system will also force buses to operate according to a regular schedule, which will enhance travel efficiency and overall traffic flow. The loop system will make it easier for passengers to locate designated stops on Kuwait maps and track arrival and departure times accurately. Additionally, it will better connect residential and commercial areas, addressing the needs of commuters more effectively. Awadhi's suggested system will also enable authorities to hold bus drivers accountable for adhering to designated stops, a concern that has also been raised by Hassan Ashraf, an Indian expat.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Ashraf called for strict action against bus drivers who fail to stop at designated stops or drive by despite passengers waiting. He also advocated for a centralized bus



Jassim Al-Awadhi



KUWAIT CITY: Jassim Al-Awadhi waits at a bus stop as a bus approaches in this file photo.

pass system — a single pass for all buses — which could attract more passengers and reduce unnecessary waiting times. Awadhi echoed this sentiment, suggesting that all bus companies should be unified into one entity.

The Indian expat highlighted the need for an

adequate number of buses on all routes and strict adherence to schedules. Finally, he added that residents in Kuwait are expecting modern amenities on buses, such as high-quality interiors and air conditioning systems, which has been a common consensus on social media.

Girl Up Kuwait: Young trailblazers give girls a voice

By Nafisa Maleah

KUWAIT: When she moved from her home country, Korea, to Kuwait, Jiye Back initially struggled to adjust to her new surroundings. However, she described how the support of women around her helped her get accustomed to living in Kuwait. "I received a lot of motherly care from the women around me. For example, it wasn't easy for me to fit in because I was the only Korean kid at my school and didn't know the language. Whenever I faced difficulties, most of the female teachers would act as my support system." Then at 15 years old, to unite and support young girls in her community, Back founded Girl Up Kuwait in 2022.

Girl Up is a girl-centered leadership development initiative, focusing on equity for girls and women in spaces where they are unheard or underrepresented. It is part of the UN Foundation which funds and encourages girls to set up clubs or organizations in different locations. "I thought that if Girl Up existed here, there would be a safe space where girls can turn their ideas into actions that would bring a positive, direct impact to Kuwait's society," Back said.

However, being president of an organization at a young age warranted some difficulty. One challenge was gaining credibility. "Because we're one of the few youth-led organizations in Kuwait, it means that every step we take is the first step that no one ever took," she said. Back revealed how, in the process of setting up a conference, they had difficulty finding a venue. "When Zainah (the vice-president) and I were drafting emails and calling around, as soon as they found out we were teenagers, they would immediately assume we weren't doing anything of



Dalal Esmael

Jiye Back

Mariem Alrabieah

value," Back recalled, adding "some of them even assumed that we were planning a party".

Back then realized the importance of asking for help and reached out to established contacts in her community, who helped Girl Up Kuwait gain credibility. Back was also not confident she would succeed at the beginning — as an expat, she questioned whether she would be able to successfully run the organization in Kuwait. "I thought: am I qualified for this?" But after taking the first step, Back realized that her aspirations weren't out of reach as Girl Up Kuwait received a lot of positive feedback and support.

Girl Up member Mariem Alrabieah, a 16-year-old Kuwaiti, described how she noticed gender inequality from a young age. "When I was younger, I would visit my mom's workplace — she used to work for the Ministry of Water and Electricity — and notice that I barely saw any women there. I would also hear stories from other Kuwaitis, such as how their families didn't allow girls to travel abroad for university but encouraged the boys. Things like that just put everything into perspective from me," she said.

Alrabieah also expressed her desire to defy gender stereotypes and create positive changes to Kuwaiti society. However, she said "we recognize that we have to take everything step by step. Changes to society happen slowly because it's hard to change people's



KUWAIT: Young girls participate in Girl Up Kuwait's first conference which focused on the role of women in Kuwaiti society and politics.

established mindsets." Back added: "Overall, Girl Up is trying to let young girls know that developing themselves as individuals is a positive thing."

Ever since volunteering with Girl Up Kuwait, Dalal Esmael, a 16-year-old Kuwaiti, felt incentivized to become a member. Esmael attended their first conference titled "Future Women Leaders: Panel and Workshop", which focused on the role of women in Kuwaiti society and politics. The panelists for the conference included former member of parliament Alia Al-Khaled, former minister Ghadeer Aseeri, and Dr Shaikha Al-Hashem. Hearing the stories of strong Kuwaiti women left a mark on her, she said.

"These women panelists started from nothing, with many people doubting them, to positions of power. For example, one of them talked about how her broth-

er was supposed to be the one running for parliament and how her family doubted her. But she proved her family wrong and showed them that there is space for women in politics," Esmael said.

Another event Girl Up Kuwait is planning is a STEM workshop where young girls could be mentored by established women in the STEM field. Additionally, the members expressed their desire to reach public school girls in Kuwait to increase the group's diversity. When asked what advice she would give to young girls, Back said: "Just be open. One thing I learned from founding Girl Up is that I received support from multiple people and places. As long as you're open to it, have the effort to share your ideas and think highly of yourself, your voice will be heard and you'll receive support."

Arab, Int'l Relations Council welcomes Palestinian reconciliation

KUWAIT: The Arab and International Relations Council welcomed the signing of a declaration on forming a national reconciliation government by Palestinian factions in Beijing, China. In a statement on Saturday, the Council's Chairman: Kuwait's Mohammad Al-Saqer, called on all factions to set aside their political differences for the benefit of Palestine and its people. He also called for unity to fight the Zionist occupation's forced displacement strategy and genocide actions in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Palestinian factions signed the agreement on July 23, aiming for a unity government that includes all factions under the Palestine Liberation Organization; the sole legal representative of the Palestinian people.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had said the agreement clears the way for an "interim national reconciliation government" for the West Bank and post-war Gaza. "Today we sign an agreement for national unity ... We are committed to national unity and we call for it," Hamas envoy Musa Abu Marzuk said after Tuesday's signing ceremony.

"The most prominent highlight is the agreement to form an interim national reconciliation government around the governance of post-war Gaza," Wang said after the factions signed the "Beijing declaration" in the Chinese capital. "Reconciliation is an internal matter for the Palestinian factions, but at the same time, it cannot be achieved without the support of the international community," Wang said. — KUNA



Air Force carries out aeromedical evacuation exercise

KUWAIT: The Air Force, represented by Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base, carried out an aeromedical evacuation exercise in cooperation with the Medical Services Authority of the Air Force. The General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army said in a press statement that the exercise simulates the scenario of transporting patients and injured people by C17 and C130 transport aircraft. It stated that the exercise aims to raise the level of cooperation, coordination, and speed of response in procedures between the Air Force and the Medical Services Authority in the field of aeromedical evacuation. — KUNA



Local

Kuwait Municipality fails to protect beaches: Audit bureau

Bureau flags lack of clear plan to monitor cleaning contractors • Waste highest in Shaab

By Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality is not effectively protecting the country's coastal environment, the State Audit Bureau has found in a recent report. The report cites the municipality's inability to produce a credible working plan to monitor the cleanliness of beaches across the country and its failure to play its role in limiting littering.

The bureau released its findings after examining Kuwait Municipality's work over the years 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 in relation to waste management in coastal areas. The municipality was not transparent about all its activities — It didn't provide the bureau with all the documents it requested, including annual cleaning plans and statistics on the complaints about beach cleanliness and measures taken to address them.

The waste problem has plagued Kuwait's beaches for years, with the municipality continuously launching public awareness campaigns calling on people to stop littering. Numerous volunteer groups have organized beach cleaning initiatives over the years. But relying on a patch work of remedial and reactionary measures hasn't proven effective in addressing the issue, as environmental activists' calls to protect Kuwait's beaches have only increased.

According to statistics published in the bureau's report, Kuwait Municipality has reported the collection of 705 tons of waste from Kuwait's coasts over the period from 2019 to 2022. The amount of waste collected in 2022 was the highest at 213 tons. The largest amount of waste collected in 2022 was in Hawally, with the Sha'ab waterfront at the top, followed by Blajat, then Anjufa and Bida'a.

An issue identified by the bureau is that waste bins are mostly placed on the sidewalks far away from those at the beach. The available bins are sparse and small, which increases the risk for waste drifting into the Arabian Gulf.

No monitoring plan

The audit bureau's report shows that Kuwait Municipality's shortcomings are also part of the problem. By law, Kuwait Municipality is responsible for the monitoring and protection of Kuwait's coastal environment from waste, pollutants and all sorts of legal violations. The municipality's jurisdiction includes both open areas and those which are part of licensed activities operated on the coast.

Departments of public hygiene and road works in the six governorates within Kuwait Municipality are responsible for the supervision and implementation of public hygiene contracts at the governorate level and preparing reports on the progress of their work. They also continuously follow-up hygiene work to prevent waste dumping in places other than those authorized. The department is also responsible for and issuing violations.

The departments didn't properly fulfil these roles, the report says. For one, they didn't ensure that waste was sorted by type, making it nearly impossible to dispose of different kinds of waste according to the best suited environmentally-sound method.

The municipality doesn't have a clear plan to monitor companies contracted to clean Kuwait's beaches and penalize them in case of a breach in contract, the report adds. Contracted hygiene companies are obliged by law to remove all waste found on the beach at all times, including dead fish. Com-



KUWAIT: Volunteers clean a beach in Sulaibikhat in this file photo taken in 2016. — KUNA

panies that don't send cleaners to manually clean the areas listed in their contract should be fined KD 50 per case per day. Those that don't use machinery to clean the area are fined KD 30 per beach per day.

The municipality has recorded no violations against cleaning companies in regard to manual cleaning in three municipalities. Assima, Hawally

and Mubarak Al-Kabeer, which is an indication that they are not properly documenting their inspection activities, says the report. Public hygiene departments in the six governorates have also made the municipality's job difficult, as they don't provide them with inspection reports assessing the performance of the contracted companies.



KUWAIT: These photos show three displays honoring Kuwait's martyrs showcased at the Avenues Mall in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 as part of exhibitions by Kuwait Martyr's Bureau. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Deputy Director of Technical Affairs at the EPA Dr Abdullah Al-Zaidan (left) is seen with Japanese Ambassador Morino Yasunari (center) during their meeting. — KUNA

Martyrs Day reminder of Kuwaiti people's allegiance to leadership

KUWAIT: The anniversary of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, also called Martyrs Day, is one of the most important days in the memory of Kuwaiti society because of it embodies the patience, sacrifice and resistance of the Kuwaiti people, Kuwait Martyr's Bureau said Saturday.



Director General Salah Al-Oufan

Director General Salah Al-Oufan said in a press statement on Saturday that the day stands as a reminder of the strength of the Kuwaiti people and embodies the greatest confirmation of the Kuwaiti people's allegiance to their political leadership, Al-Sabah family, who have for decades led the country towards prosperity.

He said that the martyrs of the Kuwaiti resistance recorded honorable contributions in Kuwait's march towards liberation. The martyrs, he said, represent the determination of the Kuwaiti people to preserve the security, independence



and unity of their homeland at every stage of history and showed the world the extent of their adherence to the great values of martyrdom for the sake of Allah and the defense of land and honor.

Oufan added that people who read the books and documents written about this difficult period need decades to absorb the great sacrifices made during that stage in the history of the people of Kuwait, who always prove their ability to face challenges and achieve ambitions and aspirations.

He stated that the historical sacrifices made by the sons of Kuwait for the sake of the homeland are fuel for future generations and repre-

sented a continuous hope for a better future under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his faithful Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Regarding the events that will be launched during the Martyrs Day, Oufan said that exhibitions will be organized in some malls such as the Avenues Mall, 360 Mall, Salhiya and Khairan under the slogan (Kuwait remains) with an innovative design which introduces new simulation technology via smart devices that enables visitors to learn about the stories of these heroes. — KUNA

EPA, Japanese Embassy discuss environmental cooperation

KUWAIT: The Environmental Public Authority (EPA) and the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait discussed on Thursday ways to enhance cooperation within the sustainable environment, exchange expertise within this domain. Speaking to KUNA after meeting with Japanese Ambassador Morino Yasunari, Deputy Director of Technical Affairs at the EPA Dr Abdullah Al-Zaidan commended the cooperation between the two sides, affirming that it came within the framework of Kuwait's sustainable development goals and international agreements and commitments on climate change and biological diversity signed by both countries.

Issues of mutual interest were discussed namely boosting cooperation for sustainable environmental and social development as well as protection of the ecosystem from climate change and pollutants, he added. He went on to reveal that cooperation to develop healthy environmental systems for future generations were also discussed during the meeting, which touched also on the negative impact of climate change on earth and Kuwait in particular. The Kuwaiti official also touched on the issue of recycling, noting that waste could be used to generate power, and leading to less load on current electrical power generating structures. He thanked the Japanese Embassy for its continuous efforts to help Kuwait tackle issues of prominent environmental importance. Ambassador Morino commended the EPA for its keenness on bolster ecological cooperation with Japan, expressing gratitude for its ongoing involvement in "Operation Turtles" cleaning campaign marking its 25th anniversary. — KUNA

Kuwaiti pilots learn to fly Turkish Bayraktar drones

ANKARA: The Kuwait Air Force announced on Saturday the graduation of the first batch of pilots and technicians who completed a training program in the operation of the Turkish Bayraktar TP2 drone. A ceremony was held by Baykar at its training center in the Kishan area in Turkey in the presence of the military attaché in Turkey and the drone project supervision officer to celebrate the achievement.

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense said on Saturday that a number of officers and non-commissioned officers in various specialties, including pilots, technicians and shooters, passed the four-month course as part of a pre-prepared training program to prepare cadres and technical and operational crews for the aircraft from the air force personnel.

The Bayraktar TP2 was tested in Ku-



ANKARA: Kuwait Air Force pilots and technicians celebrate completing the Bayraktar TP2 drone training program along with officials. — KUNA photos



wait in July 2019 and achieved a record flight time of 27 hours and 3 minutes without interruption under difficult weather conditions.

In June last year, the Kuwaiti Ministry of De-

fense concluded a contract with the Turkish side to supply the Turkish Bayraktar TP2 drone system, through a direct contract between the governments of Kuwait and Turkey with the aim of

enhancing the defense capabilities of the Kuwaiti army due to the high technical features of this aircraft in carrying out multiple tasks to support military and security operations. — KUNA

Officials discuss amending prison employment laws



KUWAIT: A ship model made of wood in one of the workshops held at Kuwait's correctional facilities is seen in this file photo.

KUWAIT: Officials discussed last week the proposal to amend laws regarding employment and wages in correctional facilities, the interior ministry said in a statement.

The discussion was part of a meeting to explore the mechanism for operating craft incubator workshops in correctional institutions. It was headed by the Director General of the Correctional Institutions Sector, Brigadier General Fahad Al-Obaid, with the presence of many official government agencies.

Prisons in Kuwait have held craft workshops to rehabilitate inmates since at least the late 1990s and products made by inmates have been displayed at exhibits over the years. The workshops offer a chance for inmates to learn a craft or profession to help them make a living once they are released.

The meeting discussed the development of the mechanism for operating craft workshops in correctional institutions within the "Sanedhum" initiative, which was launched in strategic partnership and official cooperation protocols with the Human Construction Association for Social Development, the National Office for Human Rights and the University of Kuwait.

The meeting also discussed the proposal to amend laws regarding employment and wages, the introduction of a new mechanism for the operation of workshops, and the presentation of the current reality and the mechanism of their work. Participants also examined the mechanism for managing the products of prison workshops in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, as well as Kuwait's proposed vision for operating the workshops.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Fatwa and Legislation, the Financial Supervisory Authority, the Audit Bureau, the Ministry of Finance, the National Office for Human Rights, as well as the financial and legal department in the Ministry of Interior, and the Police Association.

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: People ride their jet skis in the south of Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaitis highlight sadu, traditional foods in Jerash

NCCAL promotes publications on the Palestinian cause in light of suffering in Gaza: Official



The Kuwaiti delegation to the Jerash festival pose for a photo.



JERASH: Jordanian Minister of Culture Haifa Najjar visits the Kuwait pavilion at the Jerash festival. — KUNA photos



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KUWAIT: Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), Dr Mohamed Al-Jassar, inaugurated on Thursday, Kuwait's pavilion participating in the 38th session of the Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts held in Jordan. The Kuwait pavilion celebrates various aspects of Kuwaiti culture, which includes publication centers, culture, books, fine arts and handicrafts. There is also a live display of the traditional Sadu craft and a range of traditional Kuwaiti foods.

A group of women are participating in the Kuwaiti pavilion with interactive Kuwaiti Sadu craft displays, to which visitors flocked to experience this traditional craft. Dr Al-Jassar said that the participation of Kuwait comes to promote Arab culture, especially in light of the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

He pointed out that the Kuwaiti pavilion focuses on cultural publications, especially titles dealing with the Palestinian cause and publications related to Arabic identity. Jassar said a number of Kuwaiti writers and poets will participate during the activities of the Jerash Cultural Festival, one of the most prestigious cultural events in the region.

Jordanian Minister of Culture Haifa Najjar had commended on Thursday the State of Kuwait for its immense and tremendous role and contributions in bolstering Arab cultural development in a meeting with Dr Al-Najjar, where he lauded cultural ties between the two countries. The Jerash Festival for Culture, Arts and Literature is one of the ancient festivals in the Arab world and was launched in 1981 and has become a cultural and artistic phenomenon and carries deep cultural messages. The festival is held annually in the ancient city of Jarash in northern Jordan. —KUNA

Monday marks start of hot 'Marzam' season: Ojeiri center

KUWAIT: The Marzam hot season is set to start Monday and continue for the next 13 days, Al-Ojeiri Scientific Center announced Saturday.

The center said Marzam marks the beginning of a new stage of the summer season and is the fifth summer house for the Arabs and the sixth in the calendar of the houses of the sun and the moon,



Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Dr Mohamed Al-Jassar examines publications at the pavilion.



A Kuwaiti woman demonstrates the sadu craft in an interactive activity with visitors.

followed by the season (Al-Kulaibain), which is the usual humidity season in Kuwait and precedes the season (Suhail).

During Marzam, called the period of "ember of heat", the temperature of the earth intensifies. It's also the season when dates are ready to be harvested. The day also gets longer at 13 hours and 36 minutes during Marzam. Marzam is named after the star (Al-Marzam), which is characterized by its extreme brightness and is considered the brightest star in the sky.

The star's brightness is twice that of the star (Suhail) and is 8.6 light years away from the Earth, and it can be easily distinguished by the naked eye from the east during dawn before sunrise. — KUNA



China's FM warns Philippines over US missile deployment

Blinken and Wang discuss Taiwan, China's support for Russia in Laos

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PARIS: Passengers gather around the departure and arrival boards at the Gare Montparnasse train station in Paris on July 26, 2024. — AFP

France suffers second day of sabotage train delays

French minister says foreign involvement not ruled out in rail sabotage

PARIS: Tens of thousands of rail passengers struggled through a second day of canceled trains Saturday as investigators tracked saboteurs who paralyzed the network just ahead of the Paris Olympics opening ceremony.

The SNCF rail company chief Jean-Pierre Farandou said services would be back to normal by Monday. But deputy transport minister authorities acknowledged that 160,000 of the 800,000 people due to travel this weekend still faced cancellations.

Nearly one third of trains were canceled in northern, western and eastern France. About a quarter of Eurostar high speed trains between London and Paris also failed to leave. No claim of responsibility has been made for the meticulously planned night-time attacks on cabling boxes at junctions north, south-

west and east of the French capital, just ahead of Friday's Olympics opening ceremony in Paris. Maintenance workers thwarted a fourth attack.

But Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the investigation was progressing. "We have uncovered a certain number of elements that allow us to think that we will soon know who is responsible for what clearly did not sabotage the Olympic Games but did sabotage part of the holidays of the French people," Darmanin told France 2 television.

French authorities are on high alert for a terrorist attack during the Games, which run through August 11. Tens of thousands of police and troops are on Olympics security duties. Some 250,000 people missed their train on Friday, according to SNCF, because of the attacks that dozens of investigators are

now working on. About three out of every 10 trains were canceled Saturday in the three regions affected by the attacks, with most trains still operating delayed by between one and two hours, SNCF said.

Kathleen Cuvellier, speaking in the northern city of Lille, said her journey to Avignon in the south was going to be "hell".

Cuvellier, travelling with her two-year-old son, said she now had to take a slow train to Paris and then switch to another for Avignon. "The travel time was four hours and now it's going to be seven".

"One doesn't have any choice," commented Cecile Bonnefond, whose train from Lille to the western city of Nantes was canceled.

Trains to eastern France have largely returned to normal. But traffic will remain disrupted into

Sunday in northern France and into Britain and Belgium, while services to western France would slowly improve, SNCF said. The company said its staff worked through the night "in difficult conditions in the rain" to get the affected lines working again. The coordinated attacks staged at 4 am early Friday cut fiber optic cables running along the tracks that transmit safety information to train drivers. The attackers also set fire to the cables. "Everything will be back to normal for Monday morning," SNCF president Farandou told reporters at Paris Montparnasse station. "We will be ready". Most passengers at the station remained patience. But they were given regular loudspeaker reminders that "a malicious act" meant trains would be canceled or delayed. — AFP

Spacecraft to swing by Earth, Moon on path to Jupiter

PARIS: A spacecraft launched last year will slingshot back around Earth and the Moon next month in a high-stakes, world-first maneuver as it pinballs its way through the Solar System to Jupiter. The European Space Agency's Juice probe blasted off in April 2023 on a mission to discover whether Jupiter's icy moons Ganymede, Callisto, and Europa are capable of hosting extra-terrestrial life in their vast, hidden oceans.

The uncrewed six-ton spacecraft is currently 10 million kilometers (six million miles) from Earth. But it will fly back past the Moon then Earth on August 19-20, using their gravity boosts to save fuel on its winding, eight-year odyssey to Jupiter. Staff at the ESA's space operations centre in Darmstadt, Germany began preparing for the complicated maneuver this week.

Juice is expected to arrive at Jupiter's system in July 2031. It will take the scenic route. NASA's Europa Clipper spacecraft is scheduled to launch this October yet beat Juice to Jupiter's moons by a year.

Juice is taking the long way round in part because the Ariane 5 rocket used to launch the mission was not powerful enough for a straight shot to Jupiter, which is roughly 800 million kilometers away. Without an enormous rocket, sending Juice straight to Jupi-

ter would require 60 tons of onboard propellant—and Juice has just three tons, according to the ESA. "The only solution is to use gravitational assists," Arnaud Boutonnet, the ESA's head of analysis for the mission, told AFP.

By flying close to planets, spacecrafts can take advantage of their gravitational pull, which can change its course, speed it up or slow it down. Many other space missions have used planets for gravity boosts, but next month's Earth-Moon flyby will be a "world first", the ESA said.

It will be the first "double gravity assist maneuver" using boosts from two worlds in succession, the agency said. Juice will cross 750 kilometers above the Moon on August 19, before shooting past our home planet the following day. The probe will leave Earth at a speed of "3.3 kilometers a second—instead of three kilometers if we had not added the Moon", Boutonnet said. As Juice whizzes past Earth and the Moon, it will use the opportunity to snap photos and test out its many instruments.

Down on Earth, some will be taking photos right back. Some lucky amateur sky gazers, armed with telescopes or powerful binoculars, may even be able to spot Juice as it passes over Southeast Asia.

The move has been carefully cal-



WASHINGTON: This NASA file handout image shows Jupiter (rear) and its four planet-size moons, called the Galilean satellites, photographed in early March 1979 by Voyager 1 and assembled into this collage. — AFP

culated for years, but it will be no walk in the park. "We are aiming for a mouse hole," Boutonnet emphasized. The slightest error during its slingshot around the Moon would be amplified by Earth's gravity, potentially creating a small risk that the spacecraft could enter and burn up in Earth's atmosphere. The team on the ground will be closely observing the spacecraft—and have 12-18 hours to calculate and adjust its trajectory if needed, Boutonnet said. He mostly feared a sce-

nario in which the amount of course corrections needed would erase the gains from the double-world slingshot, meaning they would be "doing all this for nothing".

If all goes well, Juice will head back out into interplanetary space—for a little while at least. It will first head to Venus for another boost in 2025. Juice will even fly past Earth twice more—once in 2026, then a final time in 2029 before finally setting off towards Jupiter. — AFP

White House grants deportation reprieve to 11,500 Lebanese

WASHINGTON: The White House will offer deportation relief and work permits to an estimated 11,500 Lebanese nationals already in the US, due to conflict between Zionist entity and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, US President Joe Biden said in a memo on Friday.

The measure, under an authority known as De-

ferred Enforced Departure, will allow Lebanese nationals to remain in the US for 18 months and could be renewed. The announcement comes after Vice President Kamala Harris pressured Zionist entity's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday to help reach a Gaza ceasefire deal that would ease the suffering of Palestinian civilians, striking a tougher tone than Biden. Harris has emerged as the likely Democratic presidential nominee after Biden ended his campaign on Sunday.

Zionist entity and Hezbollah have been trading fire since Hezbollah announced a "support front" with Palestinians shortly after its ally Hamas attacked southern Zionist border communities on Oct 7.

US Representative Debbie Dingell, a Demo-

crat from Michigan, which is home to Lebanese Americans in Detroit and elsewhere, applauded the move and estimated it would cover 11,500 people. "Michigan is home to many Lebanese Americans who continue to watch their families suffer as Lebanon faces an unprecedented economic, political, and financial disaster," she said in a statement. Former President Donald Trump, a Republican seeking another term in the White House, has pledged mass deportations if reelected. His campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The fighting in Lebanon has killed more than 100 civilians and more than 300 Hezbollah fighters, according to a Reuters tally. — Reuters

South Africa cancels visas of 95 Libyans

WHITE RIVER, South Africa: South Africa canceled Saturday the visas of 95 Libyans rounded up at a remote camp that authorities said appeared to be an illegal military training base. The men were detained Friday in a raid at the camp in a rural part of the northeastern province of Mpumalanga, which borders Mozambique and Eswatini.

Police said the Libyans entered South Africa in April on visas issued for training as security guards. However, police suspected they were receiving military training. The Home Affairs department said it had canceled the visas which were "irregularly acquired" in the Tunisian capital Tunis and based on "misrepresentation". Police said they acted on a tip-off when they raided the camp just outside the town of White River, about 360 kilometers (220 miles) east of Johannesburg.

"The place, which was initially designated as a training site, appears to have been converted into an illegal military training base," they said Friday. A sign leading to the facility describes it as an academy offering "specialized security training".

Authorities would not update reporters on the investigation until the country's top police and security officials arrived at the scene on Saturday. South Africa has porous borders and high corruption and criminality that experts say have made it fertile ground for criminal syndicates. It also has a huge private security industry that includes training. The owner of the security company said to be running the facility was a South African national, police spokesman Donald Mdhuli told AFP Friday.

Most of the detained men did not speak English and it was not immediately clear whether they were affiliated to any group, he said. Libya is struggling to recover from years of unrest after the 2011 overthrow of longtime president Muammar Gaddafi. It is split between a UN-recognized government in Tripoli and the rival administration backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar in the east. Rival factions are known to have sought security training with private companies abroad to create elite military units, Jalel Harchaoui, an associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in Britain, told AFP.

The UN-recognized Libyan government said in a statement it "formally and clearly denies" any affiliation with the group in South Africa. — AFP

International

Blinken and Wang discuss Taiwan, China's support for Russia in Laos

Australia FM calls on Myanmar junta to 'take different path'

VIENTIANE: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated Washington's concerns over Beijing's actions toward Taiwan and its support for Russia's war in Ukraine as he met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on Saturday. Blinken, who earlier called out China for escalating maritime tensions with the Philippines, talked extensively with Wang about Taiwan and Beijing's recent "provocative" actions toward the democratically governed island, a senior US State Department official said. Those actions included a simulated blockade

provement in strained relations between the world's two biggest economies.

The two did not set a date for their next meeting, the official said. China's foreign ministry had no immediate statement on the latest meeting. Blinken is touring East Asia in a bid to reassure countries close to China of US commitment, despite political uncertainty at home. He travelled to Vietnam later on Saturday and was set to hold security talks alongside Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in Japan and the Philippines in the coming days.

Blinken also raised with Wang US concerns over human rights in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tibet, and stressed the need for more progress from Beijing on counter narcotics including fentanyl precursors coming out of China.

The two also discussed a recent agreement between Palestinian factions brokered by Beijing, the official said, casting doubt on how effective that deal could be at settling the bitter rivalry between Fatah, which runs the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas, which ran the Gaza strip. "We've seen a number of purported reconciliations before that have not proven to bear fruit," the official said. Meanwhile, Australia's foreign minister on Saturday called on Myanmar's junta to "take a different path" in its bloody crackdown on dissent, saying the situation in the war-torn country is "not sustainable". Penny Wong made the comments at an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers meeting, where the crisis in ASEAN member Myanmar has divided the bloc. The country was plunged into a civil war after the military seized power in a coup in 2021. Weeks after it seized power and launched a crackdown on dissent the junta agreed to a five-point peace plan with ASEAN but has failed to implement it. "Myanmar is deeply concerning, we see it in the economy, instability, insecurity, deaths," Wong told journalists at a press conference. "The message I want to send to the military regime is 'this is not sustainable for you and your people.'" "We urge them to take a different path and reflect the five-point consensus."

The junta has been barred from high-level ASEAN meetings over its crackdown on dissent. It had previously refused to send "non-political representatives" but two senior bureaucrats are representing the country at the talks in Vientiane. A Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity earlier this week that the military's readiness to re-engage diplomatically was a sign of its "weakened position". ASEAN has spearheaded diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis but with little success. Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have called for tougher action against the junta, while Thailand has held its own bilateral talks with the generals as well as detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The conflict in Myanmar has forced 2.7 million people from their homes since the coup in 2021, according to the United Nations. — Agencies



Diplomats take part in the 31st ASEAN Regional Forum at the 57th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane on July 27, 2024. — AFP

during the inauguration of Taiwan President Lai Ching-te, the official said. Blinken and Wang agreed to keep making progress on their countries' military-to-military ties, but did not discuss nuclear arms control talks, which China has halted in protest over Washington providing arms to Taiwan, the official said.

"In every discussion, Taiwan is the issue that they care most about. They see it as ... an internal China issue," said the official, who briefed reporters travelling with Blinken. China's government considers Taiwan an inalienable Chinese territory, which Taiwan rejects. The two talked for one hour, 20 minutes on the sidelines of a regional summit in Laos, in their sixth meeting since June 2023, when Blinken visited Beijing in a sign of im-

Blinken conveyed to Wang that US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, both believed in the importance of stability in the US-China relationship, and that a rules-based order must be upheld, the official added. Blinken also discussed China's support for Russia's defense industrial base and warned of further US actions if China does not curtail that, according to the official.

Washington has levied sanctions at targets including China-based companies selling semiconductors to Moscow, as part of an effort to undercut the Russian military machine waging war on Ukraine. "There was no commitment by the Chinese to take action," the of-

Over 4,000 evacuate after wildfire in northern California

CHICO: A huge, fast-moving and rapidly growing wildfire in northern California has forced more than 4,000 people to evacuate as firefighters battle gusty winds and perilously dry conditions, authorities said Friday. Fueled by a crushing heatwave, the so-called Park Fire—the most intense wildfire to hit the state this summer—has rapidly devoured nearly 240,000 acres (97,000 hectares) as of Friday night and is continuing to gain strength. "This fire has been rapidly expanding 4,000 to 5,000 acres an hour," incident commander Billy See said at a press conference Friday evening.

For now it is "zero percent" controlled, despite the efforts of about 1,700 firefighters, according to state agency Cal Fire, with hundreds of additional resources ordered en route. A total of 4,000 people have evacuated the towns of Cohasset and Forest Ranch, plus an additional 400 from the small city of Chico. The blaze so far has destroyed 134 structures, authorities said.

Despite the structure losses, Butte County Fire Chief Garrett Sjolund said "many more have been saved." "It is a fire that is challenging our strategies, but we are finding opportunities to deploy our resources in successful ways," Sjolund told reporters.

The fire started Wednesday near Chico, in Butte



CHICO, US: A massive pyrocumulus cloud rises from the Park Fire, which has grown to 239,152 acres and is 0 percent contained, expands at a rapid rate on July 26, 2024 near Chico, California. —AFP

County, and within hours had devastated a wide area there and in neighboring Tehama County. In just two days, the Park Fire has already become the 20th largest fire in California history by land area. The blaze has generated an enormous column of dense gray smoke, with gritty clouds akin to those of a violent storm now visible in nearby US states.

Fire departments from across the state have sent crews to lend a hand. The National Weather

Service issued a Red Flag Warning for the region through Friday night, predicting "critical" fire weather conditions.

On Thursday, police detained a 42-year-old man on suspicion of having started the fire by pushing a burning car into a ravine. Butte County prosecutor Mike Ramsey identified the man as Ronnie Dean Stout II and said he would be held without bail until a court appearance next week. —AFP

30 killed as Zionists hit school...

Continued from Page 1

saying it had "concluded its mission" there. Now it has returned in force. On Wednesday the military said troops carried out an operation in Khan Yunis and retrieved the five bodies. Zionists said on Friday that its forces had "eliminated approximately 100" militants in Khan Yunis during the week.

The October 7 attack on southern Zionist entity resulted in the deaths of 1,197 people, mostly civilians. Zionist retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,258 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not provide details of civilian and militant deaths. Its latest toll on Saturday included 83 deaths over the previous 48 hours. In the southern city of Rafah, medics said four people were killed in an air strike on a house. Military said troops had targeted "military infrastructure sites" in the Rafah area.

Al-Qahera News, which has links to Egyptian intelligence, reported on Friday that talks "to reach agreement on a truce in Gaza" would take place in Rome on Sunday. US media outlet Axios separately reported that CIA Director Bill Burns was expected to attend. The latest mediation efforts have focused on a ceasefire and hostage release accompanied by the freeing of Palestinian prisoners. In a meeting in Washington on Thursday, US President Joe Biden called on Netanyahu to "finalize" a deal and "reach a durable end to the war in Gaza", the White House said.

Mideast escalations

Massive fires and smoke covered the skies in Al-Hudaydah seaport, west Yemen, after Zionist fighter jets struck fuel tanks at the Houthis-controlled port in response to the Iranian-backed militia's drone

attack on Tel Aviv. The raids on July 20 came one day after the Houthis claimed responsibility of the Tel Aviv strike, with Zionist authorities alleging that the Houthis fired more than 200 missiles and drones towards Zionist entity, most of which were intercepted without any casualties.

However, the last drone attack has reportedly killed one settler and injured others. The attacks worsened the humanitarian crisis in Yemen even further that the Houthis have been exacerbating through carrying out terrorist attacks on oil facilities and obstructing maritime trade in the Red Sea, which prompted the Yemeni government to condemn the occupation and its violation of Yemeni sovereignty.

The Yemeni government also demanded the Houthis to cease terrorist activities, which are causing significant harm to the country and its people while also calling on them to listen to the voice of reason. This escalation comes as an extension to the months-long indiscriminate Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden; obstructing one of the most vital and active maritime passageways in the world.

One of the measures to combat these terrorist activities was for the US and UK to lead a military operation by a multinational coalition under the name "Operation Prosperity Guardian". However, US and UK diverged in their operations by targeting Houthi controlled military sites on Yemeni lands only to incite further escalations with the Houthis.

Maged Al-Madhaji, the Chairperson of Sana'a Center for Strategy Studies, said that Zionists' response by publicly engaging Yemeni territory will lead to a new level of escalations in the Red Sea. Al-Madhaji stressed that "this is the first Zionist bombing in the Arabian Peninsula and the furthest their fighters ever reached and engaged in this region." He explained that the next stage could be bleaker. He affirmed that the escalation seriously damaged any chance of "peace in Yemen." — Agencies

Palestinian Olympian wears shirt...

Continued from Page 1

Abu Sal's shirt contravened Olympic regulations. "It's a message of peace. It's a message to attract attention," he said. "This is anti-war, against killing. This abides with the Olympic Charter." "We presented it, they approved it," he added. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) bans political statements on the field

Trump accuses Harris of anti-Semitism...

Continued from Page 1

Christians and anti-abortion activists and throwing them in jail for their "religious beliefs." He also called Biden's decision to exit the election campaign a "coup" by Democrats and said America was a "laughing stock." But he saved his darkest vitriol for Harris, calling her a "bum" and a failed vice president who had rejected federal judges for being Catholic and would appoint "hardcore Marxists" to the Supreme Court.

He also accused her falsely of wanting to force

22 killed in Sudan...

Continued from Page 1

wounded 17". It was the deadliest reported bombardment since the start of the month, when 15 civilians were killed in the shelling of another city market. Intense fighting for El-Fasher erupted on May 10,



CARACAS: An employee of the National Electoral Council (CNE) places a sign identifying the polling stations in Caracas, Venezuela on July 26, 2024. — AFP

Venezuela oppn seeks to end years of socialist power

CARACAS/SAN CRISTOBAL: Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado and her coalition's candidate Edmundo Gonzalez have commanded enthusiastic crowds during their campaign to unseat President Nicolas Maduro and end 25 years of ruling party dominance. But uncertainty remains about how Sunday's election will play out, with Maduro — whose 2018 reelection is considered fraudulent by the United States, among others — sounding a confident note and opposition figures and analysts warning of possible underhandedness.

Gonzalez has attracted significant support, even from former supporters of the ruling party, but the opposition and some observers have questioned whether the vote will be fair, saying decisions by electoral authorities and the arrests of some opposition campaign staff are meant to create obstacles.

Gonzalez and Machado have urged voters to cast ballots early and hold "vigils" at polling stations until they close. They have said they expect the military to uphold the results of the vote. Venezuela's military has long supported Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez. Defense Minister General Vladimir Padrino has said the armed forces will respect the outcome of Sunday's election.

Maduro, who has been in power since 2013 and is seeking his third six-year term, has said the country has the world's most transparent electoral system and has warned of a "bloodbath" if he were to lose, comments rejected by his Latin American counterparts. Maduro's government has presided over an economic collapse, the migration of about a third of the population, and sharply deteriorated diplomatic relations, crowned by sanctions imposed by the United States, European Union and others which have crippled an already struggling oil industry.

Members of the nearly 8 million-strong Venezuelan diaspora say they found it difficult to register to vote. Fewer than 68,000 look set to be able to cast ballots. Some have opted to return home to participate. Bus companies in western Tachira state, along the border with Colombia, said they had seen an uptick of 40 percent in ticket sales in the last 10 days.

"We want to come home, but to a free Venezuela, thriving and prosperous," said Maritza Quemba, a 64-year-old seamstress who has lived in Bogota for five years and returned to San Cristobal to cast her ballot. She plans to move back to Venezuela in a year if the opposition win, she said. "I came to vote for Edmundo. I believe in him and Maria Corina," said Dani Pernia, 32, who crossed Peru, Ecuador and Colombia by bus from Chile so he could vote in San Cristobal. —Reuters

of play during sports events and during the opening and closing ceremonies, but athletes are free to express themselves in press conferences and on social media.

The Palestine Olympic Committee wrote to the IOC last week asking for a ban on athletes from Zionist entity at the Paris Olympics, which has been rejected. Rajoub said the Palestinian team intended to use the Paris Olympics to draw attention to the suffering of civilians in Gaza. Abu Sal, 20, received a wildcard for the Olympics boxing. He lives in the West Bank and is unable to train with his Cairo-based coach — a Gazan who cannot travel to him due to restrictions. — AFP

doctors to give chemical castration drugs to children and suggested she might cheat to win in November. "If Kamala Harris has her way, they will have a federal law for abortion, to rip the baby out of the womb in the eighth, ninth month and even after birth — execute the baby after birth," he claimed, in perhaps his most egregious calumny.

78-year-old Trump, now the oldest major-party nominee in history, is scrambling to reorient an election against someone two decades his junior, having expected to face an 81-year-old incumbent Biden beset by concerns over infirmity. Just last week, the former reality TV star was in cruise control as he accepted a hero's welcome — and the official presidential nomination — at the Republican convention in Milwaukee. —AFP

prompting a siege by the RSF that has trapped hundreds of thousands of civilians. Last month, the UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding an end to the siege. US mediators are to make a new attempt in Switzerland next month to broker an end to the fighting. The talks are due to open on August 14. Previous negotiations in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, have failed to put an end to the fighting which has displaced millions, sparked warnings of famine and left swathes of the capital Khartoum in ruins. — AFP

International

China's FM warns Philippines over US missile deployment

Manila completes South China Sea resupply mission

BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has warned the Philippines over the US intermediate-range missile deployment, saying such a move could fuel regional tensions and spark an arms race. The United States deployed its Typhoon missile system to the Philippines as part of joint military drills earlier this year. It was not fired during the exercises, a Philippine military official later said, without giving details on how long it would stay in the country.

China-Philippines relations are now at a crossroads and dialogue and consultations are the right way, Wang told the Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo on Friday during a meeting in Vientiane, the capital of Laos where top diplomats of world powers have gathered ahead of two summits.

Wang said relations between the countries are facing challenges because the Philippines has "repeatedly violated the consensus of both sides and its own commitments", according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement. "If the Philippines introduces the US intermediate-range missile system, it will create tension and confrontation in the region and trigger an arms race, which is completely not in line with the interests and wishes of the Filipino people," Wang said.

The Philippines' military and its foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wang's remarks. China and the Philippines are locked in a confrontation in the South China Sea and their encounters have grown more tense as Beijing presses its claims to disputed shoals in waters within Manila's its exclusive economic zone.

Wang said China has recently reached a temporary arrangement with the Philippines on the trans-

portation and replenishment of humanitarian supplies to Ren'ai Jiao in order to maintain the stability of the maritime situation, referring to the Second Thomas Shoal. Philippine vessels on Saturday successfully completed their latest mission to the shoal unimpeded, its foreign ministry said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Philippines on Saturday completed unimpeded a resupply trip to its troops at a disputed South China Sea shoal, its foreign ministry said, the first such mission under a new arrangement with China aimed at cooling tensions. The Philippines and China last week announced a "provisional agreement" on Manila's resupply missions to its contingent of troops on a naval ship grounded on the Second Thomas Shoal, after repeated clashes between vessels that have caused regional concerns about an escalation of hostilities.

The Philippines intentionally immobilized the now rusty former US vessel at the shoal in 1999 in an attempt to claim it as its territory and has since maintained a small rotational troop presence there, infuriating China, which has coast guard stationed in the area. Saturday's mission involved a civilian vessel, escorted by Philippine coast guard, with no untoward incidents reported, the foreign ministry said. China's embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the mission.

The Philippines and China both said the agreement would not change their positions on territory. The shoal is within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone and located 1,300 km (808 miles) off mainland China, which refers to it as Ren'ai Reef.

In June, a Philippine navy personnel member



VIENTIANE, Laos: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) speaks during the 25th ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the 57th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane on July 27, 2024. — AFP

lost a finger in an incident that Manila described as "intentional, high-speed ramming" by the China coast guard, which said the replenishment ship ignored repeated warnings to leave. China claims

almost the entire South China Sea as its territory based on historic maps, a claim an arbitral tribunal in 2016 ruled had no basis under international law. — Reuters

Bangladesh says student leaders held for their safety

DHAKA: Bangladesh said three student leaders had been taken into custody for their own safety after the government blamed their protests against civil service job quotas for days of deadly nationwide unrest. Students Against Discrimination head Nahid Islam and two other senior members of the protest group were Friday forcibly discharged from hospital and taken away by a group of plainclothes detectives.

The street rallies organized by the trio precipitated a police crackdown and days of running clashes between officers and protesters that killed at least 201 people, according to an AFP tally of hospital and police data. Islam earlier this week told AFP he was being treated at the hospital in the capital Dhaka for injuries police inflicted on him during an earlier round of detention.

Police had initially denied that Islam and his two colleagues were taken into

custody before home minister Asaduzzaman Khan confirmed it to reporters late on Friday. "They themselves were feeling insecure. They think that some people were threatening them," he said. "That's why we think for their own security they needed to be interrogated to find out who was threatening them. After the interrogation, we will take the next course of action."

Khan did not confirm whether the trio had been formally arrested. Days of mayhem last week saw the torching of government buildings and police posts in Dhaka, and fierce street fights between protesters and riot police elsewhere in the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government deployed troops, instituted a nationwide internet blackout and imposed a curfew to restore order.

The unrest began when police and pro-government student groups attacked street rallies organized by Students Against Discrimination that had



DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visits a hospital to check on the wounded after recent clashes between students and police during the anti-quota protests. — AFP

remained largely peaceful before last week. Islam, 26, the chief coordinator of Students Against Discrimination, told AFP from his hospital bed on Monday that he feared for his life.

He said that two days beforehand,

a group of people identifying themselves as police detectives blindfolded and handcuffed him and took him to an unknown location to be tortured before he was released the next morning. — AFP

Philippine coast guard: Oil leaking from sunken tanker

MANILA: Some of the 1.4 million liters of industrial fuel oil inside a sunken Philippine tanker has started to leak into Manila Bay, the coast guard said Saturday, as they raced to avoid an environmental catastrophe. The MT Terra Nova sank in bad weather off Manila early Thursday, killing one crew member and leaving the country potentially facing its worst oil spill disaster.

The oil slick has more than tripled in size and is now estimated to stretch 12-14 kilometers (7.5-8.7 miles) across the bay, which thousands of fishermen and tourism operators rely on for their livelihoods. Divers inspected the hull of the vessel on Saturday and saw a "minimal leak" from the valves, coast guard spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo said, adding it was "not alarming yet".

"It's just a small volume flowing out," Balilo said, adding "the tanks are intact". "We're hoping that tomorrow we will be able to start syphoning the oil from the motor tanker," he said. The ship that will carry the recovered oil is on its way to the area, he said.

The coast guard has warned that if the entire cargo leaked it would be an "environmental catastrophe". It has previously said the oil leaking from the tanker appeared to be the diesel fuel used to power the vessel, which is resting on the sea floor under 34 meters (116 feet) of water.

The coast guard now thinks the slick is a mixture of diesel and industrial fuel oil. Oil containment booms have been deployed for what Balilo earlier described as "the worst case scenario" of the cargo leaking out. Three coast guard vessels were also spreading dispersants on the oil.

Balilo called for a suspension of fishing in Manila Bay to prevent people "eating contaminated fish".

The vessel sank nearly seven kilometers from its origin in the port of Limay west of Manila. It was attempting to return to port after running into bad weather. Sixteen of the 17 crew members were rescued from the tanker, which vessel tracking website vesselfinder.com said was 65-metres long and built in 2002. The incident occurred as heavy rains fuelled by Typhoon Gaemi and the seasonal monsoon lashed Manila and surrounding regions in recent days. The state weather service said the monsoon had weakened by late Friday, giving the authorities a window of relative calm at sea to recover the cargo. The coast guard estimates the extraction would take at least seven days. — AFP

Indian soldier, armed intruder killed in Kashmir

NEW DELHI: A gunfight in Kashmir killed the eleventh Indian soldier to die in the restive Himalayan territory this month, India's military said Saturday. The military said an armed intruder from bordering Pakistan was also killed in the exchange of fire.

India's military said a group of two or three people crossed the de facto frontier dividing the territory from Pakistan and fired at an army post in Kupwara district "from close proximity". An Indian army soldier succumbed to his injuries during treatment, while another was injured but in stable condition, its statement added. "In the ensuing exchange of fire one Pakistani intruder has been killed along with recovery of weapons, ammunition and war like stores," the statement said. The military accused Pakistan's army of having aided the "infiltrators" but said the attack had been "successfully thwarted and disrupted". The soldier was the 11th killed in the region this month following a spate of militant attacks. — AFP

Kim calls for 'people's paradise' on Korean War anniversary

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for the building of a "people's paradise", as Pyongyang marked the anniversary of the end of the Korean War

on Saturday. The three-year Korean War ended 71 years ago on July 27, 1953 with a ceasefire that has never been replaced by a peace treaty.



PYONGYANG: North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (center) with war veterans as he visits the graves of soldiers to mark the occasion of the 71st anniversary of the end of the Korean War, in Pyongyang. — AFP

Pyongyang regards the conflict as a victory, and the anniversary is a public holiday. Kim said on Friday that it was the "sacred mission and duty of our generation" to "reliably defend our ideology and social system" and "build a people's paradise", according to Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency. "Comrade Kim Jong Un said it is the sacred mission and duty of our generation to protect the ideology and system defended by the previous generation of war victors with blood ... and to build a paradise for the people," KCNA said.

The North Korean leader also hailed China's support during the war and said the "friendship established as the ties of kindred would be firmly carried forward".

He visited memorials honoring the veterans of the war, including the Tower of Friendship commemorating the Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers who fought alongside North Korean forces, KCNA said. Pyongyang's state media also said young North Koreans celebrated the anniversary, vowing to "to inherit the soul of the victorious wartime generation". — Agencies

News in Brief

Afghan, Nepali migrants injured

BELGRADE: Thirty Afghan and Nepali migrants were injured when a van transporting them overturned in southeastern Serbia, the RTS state-run television reported on Saturday. Three migrants remained in a hospital while the others received medical care and were placed at a reception centre run by the country's commissariat for refugees, RTS said. The migrants are men from Nepal and Afghanistan, the broadcaster reported citing the commissariat. The accident occurred on Friday on a highway near the town Bela Palanka when the van, transporting nearly 50 migrants, slipped off the road. — AFP

8 dead in China vehicle crash

BEIJING: A vehicle crashed into pedestrians in a major city in central China early on Saturday, killing eight people and injuring five, authorities said, without specifying whether the act was intentional or not. The incident took place shortly after midnight in Changsha, capital of Hunan province, police said in a statement. "A motor vehicle hit pedestrians," it said, adding that eight people had died in the tragedy and another five had been injured, at least some of whom had been hospitalized. A 55-year-old suspect living in the area has been detained and the investigation is ongoing, the statement said. — AFP

Uganda arrests 104 protesters

KAMPALA: Police in Uganda arrested 104 people during anti-corruption protests this week and almost all of them have been charged with public order offences, a police statement said late on Friday. The government's response to the street protests drew criticism from rights campaigners and the United States, which said it was "concerned" by the arrests of dozens of protesters who were "peacefully demonstrating". In a statement posted on its X account on Friday, the US embassy in Uganda urged the government of President Yoweri Museveni to investigate allegations that some of the detained protesters had been assaulted. — Reuters

CONDOLANCES



In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Gracious,

**ALKAZEMI GROUP,
GULF MARITIME CO.,
and their employees**

extend their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family on the sad demise of

MRS. KAUSAR VAKIL.

May Allah grant her soul eternal peace

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024

G20 financial chiefs flag 'soft landing' for global economy

Bloc pledges to work together to tax ultra-rich

RIO DE JANEIRO: G20 financial leaders said on Friday the global economy was likely heading for a "soft landing", but warned wars and escalating conflicts could endanger this outlook, while more global cooperation could make growth stronger. In a joint communique after a two-day meeting in Brazil, finance ministers and central bankers from the Group of 20 major economies also committed to resist protectionism in trade and stressed the need to reduce economic inequalities.

Last month, the World Bank forecast that the global economy would avoid a third consecutive decline in growth since a major post-pandemic jump in 2021, with 2024 growth stabilizing at 2.6 percent, in line with 2023, but warned that overall output would remain well below pre-pandemic levels through 2026. "We are encouraged by the increasing likelihood of a soft landing of the global economy, although multiple challenges remain," the communique said. "Downside risks include wars and escalating conflicts," it said.

By avoiding explicit mention of the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, diplomats have worked to sidestep the disagreements between Russia and major Western nations that derailed a consensus at the finance chiefs' gathering in February. To defuse the disagreement, Brazil drafted a chair statement on geopolitical issues, stressing that these matters will be addressed by G20 leaders in November.

"The G20 made a wise decision to put geopolitical issues in their place to allow the cooperation agenda to move forward," Brazil Finance Minister Fernando Haddad told a news conference. Haddad also hailed the group's first-ever declaration calling for cooperation to effectively tax the world's largest fortunes, although that separate joint statement papered over disagreements about the right forum to advance the agenda. The G20 communique said economic activity had proved to be more resilient than expected in many parts of the world, but the recovery had been highly uneven across countries, contributing to the risk of economic divergence.

Balance of risks

The document flagged risks to the economic outlook that remain broadly balanced, with more economic cooperation, faster-than-expected disinflation and technological innovations, like the safe development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), cited among upside risks. But at the same AI tech could also turn out to be a downside risk to growth, the document said, along with economic fragmentation

Trump offers tech sector policy flips ahead of election

SAN FRANCISCO: Fiercely against social media platform TikTok, cryptocurrency bitcoin and electric cars during his presidency, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has recently flip-flopped on several issues that are dear to Silicon Valley. The presidential hopeful has, however, remained steadfast in some areas that are likely to be of concern to major US tech companies.

Here is a rundown of Trump's latest policy stance on five major tech sector issues.

"I love Elon Musk, I love him," Trump shouted Saturday during a campaign rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a state that is home to many US automakers. That statement came after reports that Musk had pledged to donate \$45 million monthly to the Republican after he narrowly survived an assassination attempt—reports Musk later denied. Trump has, however, spent years ridiculing electric cars, bashing them as too expensive and impractical, and denying climate change concerns that have driven demand for them.

"I'm constantly talking about electric vehicles, but I don't mean I'm against them; I'm all for them,"

Reeves to outline UK fiscal 'mess', tax rises likely

LONDON/RIO DE JANEIRO: New British finance minister Rachel Reeves will spell out on Monday the scale of the public finances mess she says she has inherited, potentially paving the way for tax rises that critics say she could have been more candid about before the election.

Following Labour's July 4 election victory, Reeves ordered an assessment of public spending needs which were not fully captured by official budget forecasts published in March. Reeves repeatedly said the election winner would inherit the worst set of economic circumstances since World War Two, but ruled out raising the rates of almost all main taxes to fix this. Labour sources said on Friday that Reeves now expected to reveal a 20-billion-pound (\$26 billion) hole in the public finances.

The Office for Budget Responsibility - Britain's independent fiscal watchdog - said in March that the previous Conservative government's five-year budget plans left just 8.9 billion pounds of leeway to meet a self-imposed rule designed to stop debt



RIO DE JANEIRO: General view of the G20 Ministerial Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on July 25, 2024. — AFP

and persistent inflation keeping interest rates higher for longer, extreme weather events, and excessive debt. Climate change and significant loss of biodiversity were key topics of concern, the G20 financial leaders agreed, warning that if poorer nations had to shoulder more of the cost of fighting climate change, it would make global inequality worse.

"We reiterate the understanding that the cost of inaction is greater than the cost of action," the communique said. The document also stepped-up language calling for a reform of the International Monetary Fund, that would give emerging and developing economies a bigger say in the lender of last resort. The G20 communique underlined the "urgency and importance of realignment in quota shares to better reflect members' relative positions in the world economy."

G20 nations have also agreed to work together

he said, adding that the cars are not for everyone. If elected, however, Trump has said he wants to end federal subsidies that encourage buying electric cars.

The move is not likely to hurt Tesla, some of whose models are not eligible for the rebates, but would hit its US competitors. Trump tried in vain to ban Chinese-owned video app TikTok on national security grounds during his presidency, and spoke out against China routinely during his failed bid for reelection in 2020. Trump expressed concerns—echoed by political rivals—that the Chinese government might tap into US TikTok users' data or manipulate what they see on the platform. He even called for a US company to buy TikTok, with the government sharing in the sale price.

Now that US President Joe Biden's administration has signed a law to ban the app for the same reasons, unless it is sold, Trump has reversed course. "Now (that) I'm thinking about it, I'm for TikTok, because you need competition," he recently told Bloomberg.

"If you don't have TikTok, you have Facebook and Instagram—and that's, you know, that's Zuckerberg," Facebook, founded by Mark Zuckerberg and part of his Meta tech empire, was among the social media networks that banned Trump after attacks on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, driven by concerns that he would use the platform to promote more violence.

Trump's sudden support for cryptocurrencies appears to stem from a belief, expressed to Bloomberg,

to make the super-rich pay their taxes, but stopped short of a more substantial deal, according to a declaration adopted Friday after a meeting of finance ministers in Rio de Janeiro. The thorny topic of tackling tax-dodging billionaires dominated the two-day meeting in the Brazilian city.

The initiative is a key priority for Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who heads this year's grouping, which includes the world's major economies, the European Union and the African Union. Lula was hoping for a minimum tax on the moneyed elite, but the final statement represents a compromise on a topic that divided member states.

"With full respect to tax sovereignty, we will seek to engage cooperatively to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are effectively taxed," said the statement.

"Wealth and income inequalities are undermining

economic growth and social cohesion and aggravating social vulnerabilities."

Brazil's Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said that "from a moral point of view it is important that the twenty richest nations consider that we have a problem, which is to have progressive taxation on the poor and not on the rich."

The United States and Germany dismissed the need for a global deal on taxing billionaires, an initiative which is backed by France, Spain, South Africa, Colombia and the African Union. International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva hailed the G20's position on "tax fairness." "The shared vision of G20 Ministers on progressive taxation is timely and welcome, as the need to rebuild fiscal buffers while also attending to social and development needs involves difficult decisions in many countries," she said in a statement. — Agencies



WEST PALM BEACH, US: Former US President and 2024 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump gestures after speaking at Turning Point Action's "The Believers Summit" in West Palm Beach, Florida, on July 26, 2024. — AFP

US defends law forcing sale of TikTok app

SAN FRANCISCO: TikTok's collection of user data makes it a national security threat, the US Justice Department said Friday in response to a civil suit by the Chinese-owned firm aimed at preventing the forced sale of the app.

TikTok's suit in a Washington federal court argues that a law, which forces the video platform to be sold next year or face a US ban, violates First Amendment rights of free speech. The US response counters that the law addresses national security concerns, not speech, and that TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance is not able to claim First Amendment rights in the United States.

"Given TikTok's broad reach within the United States, the capacity for China to use TikTok's features to achieve its overarching objective to undermine American interests creates a national-security threat of immense depth and scale," the Justice Department wrote in its filing. It details concerns that ByteDance could, and would, comply with Chinese government demands for data about US users or yield to pressure to censor or promote content on the platform, senior justice department officials said in a briefing.

TikTok gives Beijing the "means to undermine US national security" by collecting vast amounts of sensitive data from US users, and by utilizing a proprietary algorithm to control which videos users see, the DOJ filing said. "That algorithm can be manually manipulated, and its location in China would permit the Chinese government to covertly control the algorithm—and thus secretly shape the content that American users receive," it added.

TikTok responded to the DOJ filing on Saturday, saying "the Constitution is on our side." "The TikTok ban would silence 170 million Americans' voices, violating the First Amendment," the company said in a statement on social media platform X, referring to the app's users in the United States. "As we've said before, the government has never put forth proof of its claims, including when Congress passed this unconstitutional law." The DOJ filing argues that the law's focus on foreign ownership of TikTok takes it out of the realm of the First Amendment.

US intelligence agencies are concerned that China can "weaponize" mobile apps, justice department officials said. "It's clear that the Chinese government has for years been pursuing large, structured datasets of Americans through all sorts of manner, including malicious cyber activity; including efforts to buy that data from data brokers and others, and including efforts to build sophisticated AI models that can utilize that data," a senior justice department official said. —AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: The US Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen (right), with UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, before a bilateral meeting in the framework of the G20 Ministerial Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

rising. Reeves has said that - while she would rather lower taxes than raise them - she would not make any pledges that she could not stick to under debt rules which Labour pledged to follow.

Anticipating criticism of her assessment of the finances, Reeves told reporters at a G20 finance leaders' meeting in Brazil late on Thursday that she had been frank about the need to repair public services and stop debt rising. "We have inherited a mess," she said. "I've always been honest that the scale of the

challenge confronting this new government is immense because of the damage done to the economy and to public services by the Conservatives."

Reeves declined to comment on whether the hole was 20 billion pounds or how exactly she intended to cover it before addressing parliament.

The Conservatives immediately attacked the 20-billion-pound figure as a prelude to unnecessary tax rises. "Labour's claims are nothing but a fabrication - the books have been wide open since the OBR was set up 14 years ago," Conservative former finance minister Jeremy Hunt said. New Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Wednesday "we have a more severe crisis than we thought as we go through the books" after 14 years of Conservative government, which ministers have said impacts everything from prisons to immigration and health.

But economists and analysts said that although a finance ministry review of spending needs might soften the political blow from tax rises, in economic terms there were no big surprises that Labour could not have foreseen. Reeves herself told the Financial Times in June that Labour did not need to win an election to find out about the bad state of public finances. The Labour Party's manifesto heading into the election spelled out small tax rises to fund specific commitments but other fiscal details were scant, aside from a general commitment to boost resources through higher growth. — Reuters

ABK announces 22% increase in net profit to KD 29.06mn for H1 2024

Results underscore bank's financial stability, healthy fiscal position and robust balance sheet

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) proudly announced its robust financial results for H1 2024, once again affirming its position as a leading financial institution.

Financial performance

ABK reported a net profit of KD 29.06 million, representing a 22 percent increase and an increase in earnings per share (EPS) of 20 percent to 12 fils. Operating income increased by 15 percent to KD 100.94 million while operating profit witnessed an increase of 21 percent, reaching KD 53.57 million, reflecting the bank's strong profitability and shareholder value creation.

Total assets reached KD 6.64 billion while maintaining steady growth in loans and advances amounting to KD 4.5 billion, with customer deposits at KD 3.97 billion, affirming the Group's reputation as a trusted financial partner. Moreover, the bank's non-performing loan (NPL) ratio stood at 1.31 percent, with NPL coverage at 447 percent, capital adequacy ratio (CAR) at 15.3 percent, and shareholders' equity at KD 607 million, further underscoring ABK's financial stability, healthy financial position, and robust balance sheet.

Solid plans

Commenting on this achievement, Talal Behbehani, Chairman of ABK, stated, "The growth that the Group has witnessed in financial indicators during H1 2024 demonstrates our success in developing appropriate plans that keep pace with the continuous changes in the Kuwaiti, regional, and global economies. It also highlights our strong financial market position in addition to our commitment to preserving shareholders' rights and consistently providing them with added value."

He reiterated that ABK is fully prepared to contribute to financing upcoming large developmental projects in Kuwait in the near future. The chairman expressed confidence that the partnership between the public and private sectors in implementing Kuwait Vision 2035 as envisaged would elevate economic activity and contribute to transforming Kuwait into a regional and global commercial and financial center.

Behbehani emphasized the adoption of the highest standards of governance and



Talal Behbehani
ABK Chairman

The growth that the Group has witnessed in financial indicators during H1 2024 demonstrates our success in developing sophisticated and distinctive plans.



Abdulla Al-Sumait
Acting Group CEO at ABK

We have once again succeeded in maintaining our growth by consistently introducing worthwhile banking products, services, and solutions that meet individual and corporate customers' ever-evolving needs.

transparency in dealing with all stakeholders and shareholders in ABK, indicating that the Board of Directors and Executive Management consistently work on implementing plans and operations in a timely manner to provide the best returns and maintain trust.

He also revealed that, during H1 2024, the Board of Directors approved the new environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and sustainability 5-year strategy, aimed at elevating the Group's successes and achievements across all sectors. Furthermore, Behbehani stated that ABK continues to work on its digital transformation plan and adopts the highest security standards in all divisions. This includes signing agreements for utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, enhancing performance and services, and innovating more banking solutions to assist customers in executing their financial transactions in the simplest and most secure ways.

Behbehani added, "We are pleased to have maintained our high ratings with a stable outlook by global credit rating agencies, with an A rating from Fitch and an A2 from Moody's." He affirmed that these confirm the Group's financial stability and its ability to earn trust as a reliable banking and financial partner in both the Kuwaiti and regional markets it operates in, namely in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. He emphasized, "These ratings reflect the high confidence we enjoy thanks to our innovative financial products and services that are widely popular in the market."

Committed to innovation

On his part, Abdulla Al-Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at ABK, said,

"We have once again succeeded in maintaining our growth by consistently introducing worthwhile banking products, services, and solutions that meet individual and corporate customers' ever-evolving needs." This is in addition to ABK's participation in several financial deals, confirming the trust that the Group enjoys from global companies.

New campaigns

H1 2024 witnessed the launch of several new campaigns, reflecting ABK's commitment to offering customers exclusive benefits as a token of appreciation for their trust. Some examples include the launch of Al-Tajer Plus



to assist small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in growing their businesses and increasing their profitability. Another great success is the recent summer campaign, providing cardholders with exceptional benefits and discounts. In addition, the UAE mortgage loan was introduced, allowing customers to acquire financing for property purchases as part of ABK's continuous efforts to integrate operations across the region. This comes alongside the debut of the first-of-its-kind Family Banking package in the Kuwaiti bank-

ing sector, aimed at providing comprehensive banking services to all family members. Al-Sumait stated, "The upcoming period will involve the launch of even more promotional campaigns to attract customers and establish additional partnerships that provide exclusive benefits and rewards to all segments. This is all in an effort to contribute to further elevating ABK's position in the market."

Awards

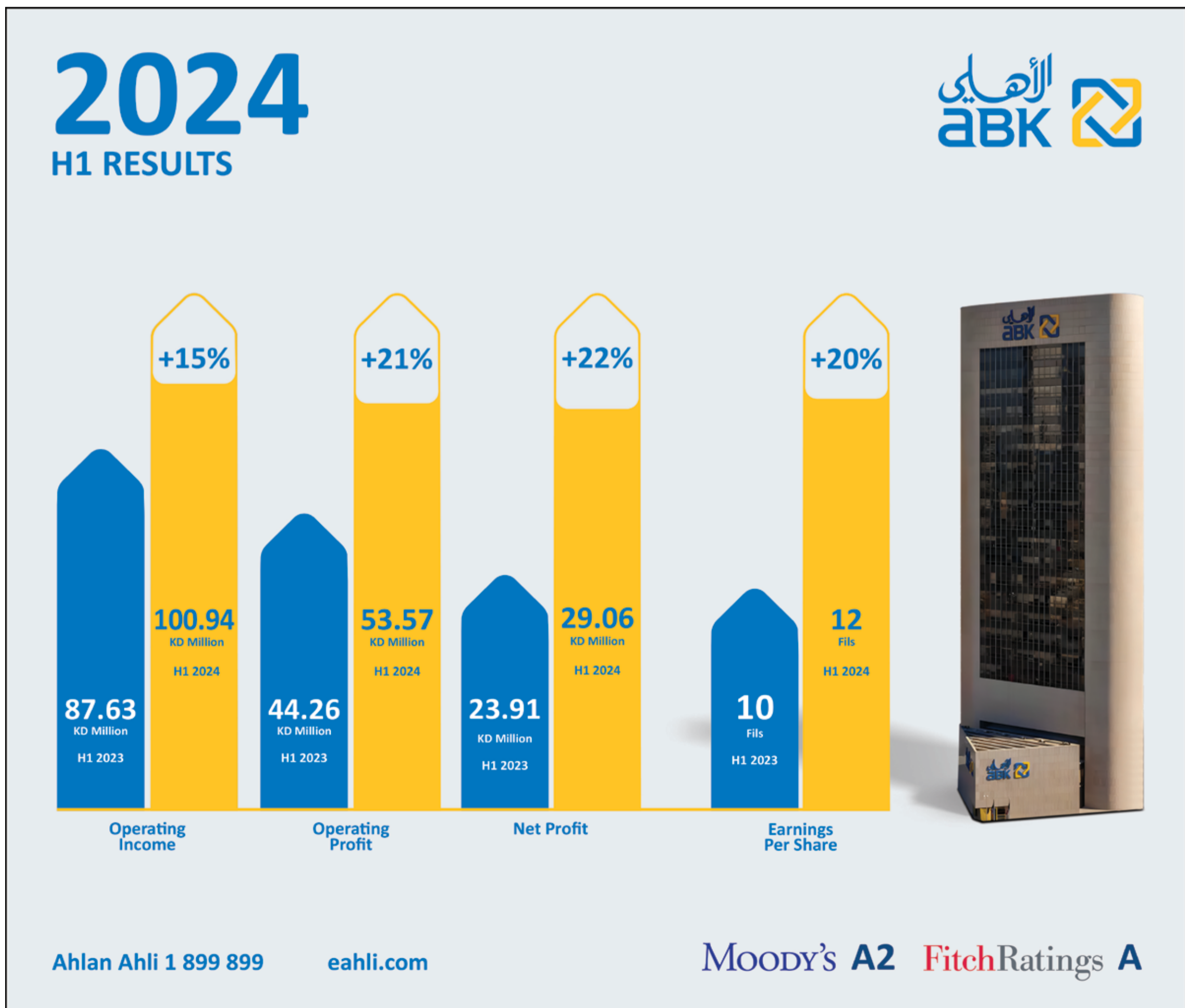
These efforts have not gone unnoticed where Al-Sumait highlighted that the Group received numerous reputable international awards during H1 2024. He said, "These accolades have acknowledged ABK's outstanding performance, provision of the best banking services, products, and solutions to customers, and adherence to the highest standards in the banking industry." The most recent of which was ABK's notable wins at the MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2024 for Excellence in Customer Protection/Fraud Control (Kuwait), recognizing the Bank's unwavering commitment to safeguarding its customers' interests and maintaining robust fraud control measures. The second was Best Retail Bank - Egypt award, acknowledging ABK's unparalleled dedication to providing top-notch retail banking services and solutions in Egypt. Furthermore, ABK received JP Morgan's Elite Quality Recognition award alongside international accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS). This is in addition to ABK's subsidiary, ABK Capital, being awarded Most Innovative Multi-Asset Fund Management Company from International Finance.

Widespread presence

Al-Sumait added that the Group also participated in global events and conferences during H1 2024, such as the Global Digital Banking Conference as well as the Visa Payments Forum, and the Dubai FinTech Summit. He stated, "This provided the opportunity to stay abreast of the latest developments in payment technologies as well as the global banking industry to deliver the same standard to customers across all the markets we operate in." This effort falls in line with ABK's consistent endeavor to achieve financial inclusion in the communities it serves.

In this spirit, ABK was keen on enhancing its community presence by sponsoring various events, such as Amiri Hospital's Eighth Medical Scientific Day and the final football match of HH the Amir, as well as several job fairs. ABK also continues to support the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' banking awareness campaign. This includes spreading financial awareness about various banking services and solutions, providing tips on how to combat financial fraud, and informing customers of their rights and responsibilities when dealing with banks.

Al-Sumait concluded his statement stating, "I would like to express my appreciation to our customers for their unwavering loyalty and trust. I also commend the efforts of all our employees and encourage them to continue their pursuit of excellence that allows us to maintain our position as a leading bank in the sector."



Business

Fed's favored inflation measure cools

US policymakers get more leeway ahead of interest rate decision

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve's favored inflation measure eased further in June, according to government data published Friday, in more good news for policymakers ahead of next week's interest rate decision. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index eased to an annual rate of 2.5 percent in June, the Commerce Department said in a statement, down slightly from 2.6 percent a month earlier.

This was in line with the median forecast of economists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. "Today's report shows we are making real progress fighting inflation," President Joe Biden said.

"The agenda that Vice President Harris and I are fighting for has helped us come back strong from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and deliver for working families," he added in a statement. While the June data is sure to be viewed as a positive development by policymakers at the US central bank, inflation still remains stuck above the Fed's long-term target of two percent.

At the same time, the labor market appears to be moving into better balance between job seekers and job creators, and the economy remains in robust health, growing at an annualized rate of 2.8 percent in the second quarter of the year, according to data published earlier this week.

In recent weeks US central bank policymakers have been sounding more optimistic about the chances of an interest rate cut, even as they have continued to urge patience until the data supports

such a move. "We've said that you don't want to wait until inflation gets all the way down to two percent, because inflation has a certain momentum," Fed Chair Jerome Powell told lawmakers in Congress earlier this month.

"If you waited that long, you've probably waited too long," he added.

Stripping out volatile food and energy prices, the closely watched core measure of inflation eased to an annual rate of 2.6 percent in June—also in line with expectations. The data published Friday also show that personal income rose by 0.2 percent from a month earlier, while personal savings as a percentage of disposable income fell to 3.4 percent, down slightly from a revised figure of 3.5 percent in May.

The Fed meets to set interest rates on Tuesday and Wednesday next week, with analysts and traders broadly expecting it to remain on pause once more. But there is a growing consensus around a September interest rate cut, with futures traders now fully pricing in the chances of an interest rate cut, according to data from CME Group. "Overall, the data show slowing but positive spending and a deceleration in inflation" in the second quarter, High Frequency Economics chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

"From the Fed's perspective, cumulatively, we think the data show enough progress—on both inflation and labor market conditions—for policymakers to open the door to a rate cut in September" next week, she added. "This provides clear support



MONTEBELLO, US: People shop at a supermarket in Montebello, California. The US Federal Reserve's favored inflation measure eased further in June, according to government data published on July 26, 2024. — AFP

for the Fed to start cutting interest rates in September," Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic wrote in a note to clients.

She added that Nationwide expects one quarter percentage-point cut in September, and another before the end of the year. — AFP

Creating a PPP enabling environment

By Hassan Abdulrahim

KUWAIT: In this section, we will discuss, what we believe at Visionary Consulting, the essential steps required to develop a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) program. The primary questions we'll address are:



How can governments best facilitate the development of PPP projects? What can governments do to foster a PPP enabling environment?

Governments can establish an environment favorable to PPP development by taking four primary steps: formulating a clear policy, ensuring legal and regulatory frameworks are compatible with PPPs, ensuring relevant institutions can support PPP implementation, and securing sufficient resources to finance PPP projects and make them attractive to private partners. Let's examine each of these elements in detail.

1. Policy formation

The government must develop a vision and strategy for using PPPs to deliver public infrastructure services. This involves addressing the objectives of the PPP program, the targeted sectors, the types of PPPs envisioned, and the implementation strategy. This can be done through a policy document or a dedicated PPP law. High-level political support is crucial due to the sensitive nature of PPP projects. Public opinion can easily sway towards the belief that too much favor is given to the private sector, leading public authorities to question their commitment to a PPP project. Political support is often the primary roadblock to successful PPP transactions.

Strong, consistent, and stable support from top policymakers is essential. Support from senior politicians is required to build consensus among different ministries and agencies and to address internal resistance. Without internal buy in, government officials may only submit projects feasible via traditional procurement methods, dooming the PPP program to failure. An official PPP policy sends a clear message to the private sector about the government's intention to develop a pipeline of PPP projects, encouraging long-term investment.

A well-prepared pipeline of projects is essential to convince investors of the viability of PPPs in a country. Starting with the easiest projects, those most likely to succeed, is a good strategy to build a convincing track record progressively.

2. Legal and regulatory frameworks

The legal and regulatory frameworks must be compatible with PPPs to attract private investors. Legislation might need adjustment to make private sector involvement possible. Key considerations include defining the competent authority to approve PPP projects and sign PPP contracts, authorizing private involvement in various sectors, and addressing limits to foreign investment in infrastructure. A clear legal framework is essential to prevent parties from using legal arguments to exit PPP contracts. Adequate procurement rules are also crucial to establish a fair, transparent, and competitive bidding process.

Adjustments to public procurement rules may be required due to the complexity of PPP projects. Dispute resolution mechanisms, such as arbitration, should be in place to deal with differences between public and

private partners over long-term contracts. Regulation of tariffs is another key consideration. If a private operator is authorized to collect fees from users, the method of setting and adjusting fees over time must be clear. Sector regulations are often necessary to establish methodologies for tariff setting and review.

3. Institutional arrangements

Adequate institutional arrangements are crucial for PPP enabling environments. A clear allocation of responsibility is required to implement a policy. Government officials must have the capacity to implement PPP projects and access the required expertise. Many governments establish PPP units to provide necessary institutional support. These units typically perform three broad functions: supervision, facilitation, and promotion.

Supervision: PPP units screen project proposals to assess their suitability for PPP implementation. They advise approval committees at different stages and may also monitor if the PPP program meets its objectives.

Facilitation: PPP units provide technical support to government agencies in identifying PPP opportunities and developing PPP projects. They facilitate coordination among various government agencies and rely on external expertise for technical support. Standardized procedures and documents can reduce transaction costs.

Promotion: PPP units support the development of well-prepared pipelines of projects and market them to investors. They promote PPP solutions internally, raise awareness among government officials, and manage public perception by providing information on the benefits of involving the private sector in public infrastructure delivery. The location of PPP units varies by government. They are often close to the Ministry of Finance due to the budgetary implications of PPP projects.

To prevent conflicts of interest, assessment responsibilities may be allocated to another institution, like a National Audit Office.

4. Financial support mechanisms

Developing a PPP program requires funding to prepare projects. Some countries establish project development facilities to access expertise not available internally. These facilities recruit consultants to draft PPP contracts, develop project specifications, and evaluate financial proposals. Dedicated facilities ensure resources can be quickly mobilized, independent of the yearly national budget cycle. Financial support mechanisms may include tax exemptions, reduced import duties, and guarantees to cover risks the private partner is unwilling to take. Governments may also cover partial project costs through viability gap funding.

This funding fills the gap necessary to make economically viable projects financially feasible. Having said that, we believe that the success of a PPP program is influenced by the economic and business climate of a country.

PPP project viability depends on the overall macroeconomic environment, the availability of a qualified labor force, a large enough customer base, and economic activity that creates demand for infrastructure. The state of the local financial sector also determines whether the private sector can easily access long-term funding for projects. Private investors are more likely to invest in countries with a favorable business climate. By addressing these key steps, policy formation, legal and regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements, and financial support mechanisms, governments can create an enabling environment that fosters successful PPP programs.

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

Weyay Bank introduces enhanced personalization features to its mobile app

KUWAIT: Weyay Bank redefines the way users interact with their own banking app by providing a more personalized and customizable banking experience. This step sheds light on the Bank's continuing efforts to optimize its mobile app in a way that allows users to add their own touch to the homepage and make it as unique as their individual preferences.

The new homepage design features a sleek and intuitive layout that aims to improve user engagement and navigation. With a focus on simplicity and functionality, it ensures that users can easily access the app digital features and products with just a few taps, making their overall experience seamless and enjoyable.

Some of the key highlights of the new update include:

- Customizable widgets that help users personalize their homepage by showing, hiding, or rearranging products in a way that suits their individual style.
- A visually appealing layout that showcases the app's features and user's products.
- Simplified navigation for easy access to the new features and products introduced by the Bank.

"As we believe in providing our customers with a banking experience that is not only convenient but also tailored to their individual needs, we aim for refreshing our app homepage with some enhancements that add to its personalization and customization features," mentioned Mohammad Al-Hunaidi, Product Owner at Weyay Bank. "With these enhancements, we think of our app users as owners who are empowered and able to take control of their own banking experience and customize their homepage the way they want."

Russian central bank sharply hikes rates to 18%

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank hiked its key interest rate by 200 basis points to 18 percent on Friday, the highest level in more than two years, and vowed to continue tightening until inflation rates in an overheated economy come down. The bank also raised its inflation forecast for 2024 to 6.5–7.0 percent, well above its 4 percent target. It sees annual price growth declining to 4.0–4.5 percent in 2025.

The market was expecting the hike, a Reuters poll of economists showed, though some dissenting voices in the Russian elite had favored a more dovish approach, criticizing the bank for stifling economic growth. The key rate is now at its highest since April 2022. The Bank of Russia raised rates to 20 percent in an emergency move soon after the Kremlin sent Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

"For inflation to begin decreasing again, monetary policy needs to be tightened further," the bank said in a statement. Its next rate-setting meeting is due on Sept 13. Annual inflation, the bank's main area of concern, grew

to 9.0 percent as of 22 July from 8.6 percent in June, the bank said. Inflation stood at 7.4 percent in 2023, compared with 11.9 percent in 2022. "Returning inflation to the target requires considerably tighter monetary conditions than presumed earlier," the bank said. "The Bank of Russia will consider the necessity of further key rate increase at its upcoming meetings."

Central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina said the economy remained "substantially overheated", while noting a broad consensus among board members regarding the rate decision, with some even suggesting a more significant hike. Nabiullina dismissed an earlier suggestion from Igor Sechin, CEO of oil giant Rosneft, to take cues from the People's Bank of China, which embarked on an easing cycle this week. She emphasized that economic conditions in Russia and China were different.

"Currently, China is balancing around zero inflation, they are pursuing a policy diametrically opposed to ours because our task is to reduce inflation, while their task is to avoid deflation," she said. Nabiullina said she expected monthly inflation rates to start coming down in July but it would take longer to achieve a sustainable decline in price growth, noting that the central bank underestimated the impact of budget spending

Digital trade deal advances but US still not on board

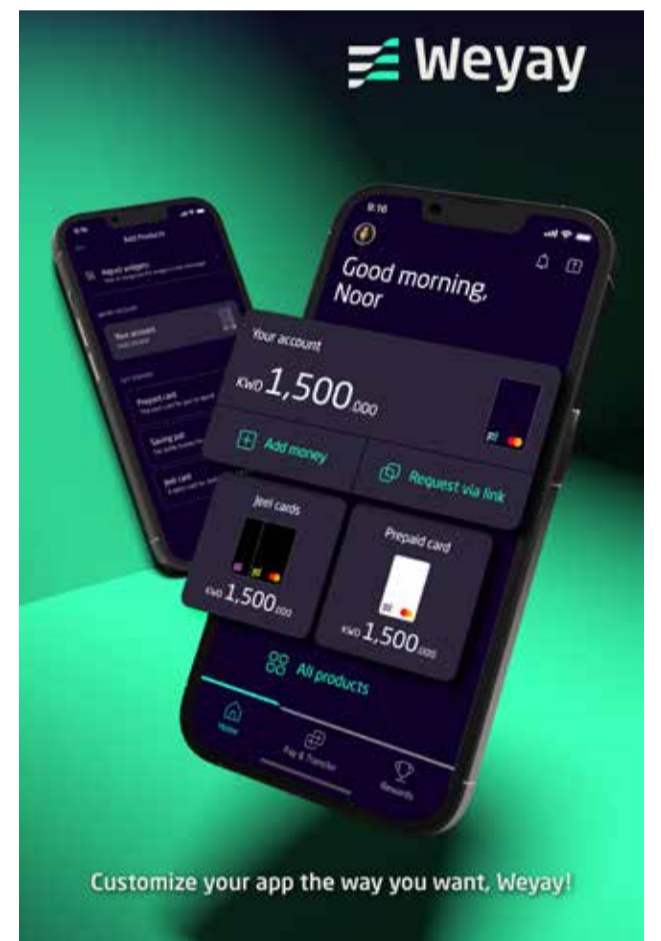
GENEVA: Efforts to draw up global digital trade rules advanced Friday when dozens of nations wrapped up negotiations with a draft text, but more talks will likely be necessary as the United States and several other countries are still not on board.

Protections for online consumers, digitalization of customs procedures and recognition of electronic signatures figure among the measures laid out in the text aimed at promoting and facilitating digital transactions.

European trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis hailed the text as "historic", writing on social network X that countries had "negotiated the first global rules on digital trade".

"This will facilitate e-transactions, boost innovation, and integrate developing countries into the digital economy," he said. Once in place, the deal "will make trade faster, cheaper, fairer and more secure", Britain said in a statement. Digital commerce is growing far faster than its traditional counterpart.

The OECD group of economically developed nations says it estimated that in 2020, e-commerce already made up a quarter of global trade, making it worth just under \$5 trillion. Despite its growing importance, "no common set of global



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An employee adjusts packs of 1,000 ruble banknotes at a Goznak factory in Moscow on July 11, 2019. — AFP

on inflation in the first half of the year. The central bank noted an "upward deviation of the Russian economy from a balanced growth path" and pointed to labor shortages and the continued expansion of retail and corporate lending as key factors behind high inflation. The bank raised its forecast for GDP growth in 2024 to 3.5 percent–4.0 percent from 2.5 percent–3.5 percent. President Vladimir Putin has estimated that the Russian economy grew by over 5 percent in the first half of this year. — Reuters

rules exist", said British Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds.

Finalizing the negotiations "is a huge step forward in correcting that and ensuring British businesses feel the benefit".

The talks were launched in 2019, with around 90 negotiating countries—representing 90 percent of the WTO membership—including heavy-hitters like the United States, the European Union and China. Australia, Japan and Singapore, which have jointly been leading the Initiative on Electronic Commerce talks, presented a joint statement during a closed-door meeting at the WTO confirming that "after five years of negotiations, participants had achieved a stabilized text". — AFP

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024



Mohammed Bin Rashid Library.



A copy of the Holy Quran dating back to the 17th century.



Mohammed Bin Rashid Library.

Dubai's Mohammed Bin Rashid Library: A beacon of knowledge, culture

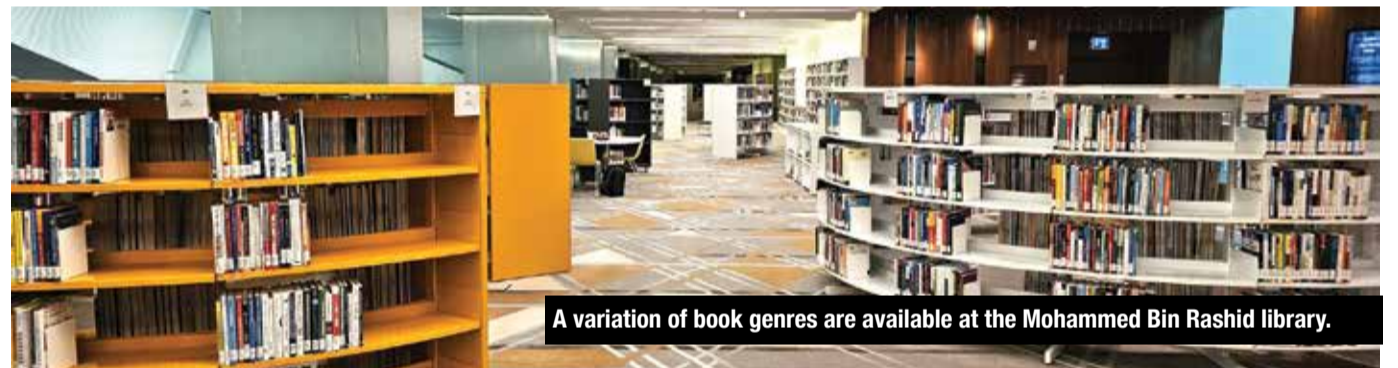


The largest library catalogue in the Middle East and North Africa. —KUNA photos

The Mohammed Bin Rashid Library, overlooking Dubai Creek, is an architectural marvel shaped like a rahal; a traditional wooden book rest used to hold the Quran. The seven-storey building is one of Dubai's most ambitious cultural initiatives, aiming to create a beacon of knowledge, culture, and cre-

ativity. Established by law in 2016 during the National Year of Reading, the library embodies the vision of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum to develop a knowledgeable society. It actively supports Arabic literature by ensuring public access to modern and rare texts, encouraging young writers through its Ar-

abic language publishing program. With a robust event calendar and continually expanding resources, the library serves as a cornerstone for preserving Arabic culture and heritage while fostering a vibrant community of learners. —KUNA



A variation of book genres are available at the Mohammed Bin Rashid library.

'God save Dua Lipa': Festival puts Kosovo on music map

Amid a sea of denim shorts, selfies, sequins and thumping bass lines, the setting could easily be mistaken for Coachella or Glastonbury. But the Sunny Hill festival in Pristina is helping turn Kosovo into a go-to destination during Europe's summer festival season, thanks in large part to its founder: Dua Lipa.

For years, Kosovo was associated with its bloody war against Serbia that pitted ethnic Albania insurgents against Serb forces in the late 1990s, leaving thousands dead and triggering a refugee crisis. But the arrival of Lipa on the international pop scene has helped showcase Kosovo's other side -- young, talented and full of ambition. With more than 87 million followers on Instagram and more than 25 million albums sold, the British-born singer of Kosovo descent is one of the biggest pop stars in the world.



Revellers attend the Sunny Hill Festival near Kosovo's capital Pristina on July 25, 2024. —AFP

Alongside an endless tour schedule, film roles and hosting a popular podcast, Lipa remains one of the most vocal promoters of all things Kosovo.

Very happy

Launched in 2018 with her father, the Sunny Hill festival she created has brought some of the biggest names to perform in this tiny corner of the Balkan. Late Thursday afternoon, as the first notes echoed from the main stage, a young crowd passed through the festival entrance, ever grateful to Lipa for bringing another star-studded line up to the capital Pristina.

"I'm very happy that she's promoting our country with these big, big artists and

bringing them to our country," said Rita Ramadani, 19. For its fifth edition, Sunny Hill boasts a roster of performers that rivals more established festivals.

Headliners this year include British rap sensation Stormzy and the king of afrobeat, Burna Boy. Bebe Rexha -- who is also of ethnic Albanian origin -- electrified the crowd as she sang her global hit "Me, Myself and I", while speaking Albanian with the audience in between songs.

Albania and Kosovo flags dotted the stages and were scattered across the audience during performances, where festival goers regularly hold two crossed hands in the sign of the Albanian eagle aloft. This is a festival in Kosovo, after all.

"We are all very happy that this is happening right now and people from all the world got to hear about Kosovo, and about Sunny Hill. Thanks to Dua Lipa," said festival attendee Nita Krasniqij.

And while the festival attracts thousands of locals, music lovers from abroad are also making their way to Pristina. "We're here because it's amazing music," said Michael Maguire, who travelled to the festival from Brussels with friends.

"Kosovo's an amazing country, full of young people, and very vibrant."

'It is miraculous'

But hosting a concert in Kosovo has not always been easy. "In the first years it was more difficult to invite artists as their managers would look online for information about Kosovo and see it might be risky," Lipa's father and festival co-founder Dukagjin Lipa told local media. "Now we don't have that problem because we have built a name!" According to organisers, around 45 percent of the festival's tickets this year were sold abroad.

Priced at 200 euros a ticket -- which is nearly half the average monthly salary in Kosovo -- few local youngsters are able to afford entry to the four-day festival. To help control costs, Pristina's municipal government provided the land, security, transportation and garbage collection for free. "It is miraculous that it happens in Pristina," mayor Perparim Rama told AFP. "It provides us with the fantastic opportunity to showcase our people, our culture, our heritage." —AFP

Justin Timberlake seeks to dismiss DUI case

An attorney for Justin Timberlake asked a judge to dismiss drunk driving charges against the US pop singer Friday, saying his client was "not intoxicated" when he was arrested last month.



Justin Timberlake performs onstage during the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Awards at Dolby Theatre on April 01, 2024 in Hollywood, California. —AFP

On June 18, the 43-year-old entertainer had been pulled over in the town of Sag Harbor, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of New York City, after police observed his BMW drive through a stop sign and struggle to stay within street lanes. Timberlake had been en route to a friend's house after getting dinner at a local hotel's restaurant. Officers arrested him on suspicion of drunk driving.

Timberlake, who is currently on tour in Europe, did not attend Friday's court hearing in New York. He was ordered to attend the next proceedings on August 2, though will be allowed to do so via videoconference. Judge Carl Itrace agreed to review a motion filed by Timberlake's attorney, Edward Burke, which sought to dismiss the case, alleging the complaint filed by the arresting officer was defective. "The police made a number of very significant errors in this case," Burke said in a statement after the hearing. "The most important fact to know about this case is that Justin was not intoxicated and should not have been arrested." —AFP

Kobe Bryant locker, Maradona jersey up for auction in New York

Kobe Bryant's Staples Center locker and Maradona's 1986 World Cup jersey went on display Friday in New York, part of an auction of rare sports memorabilia at Sotheby's.

Bryant's locker, which he used for the majority of his career at the Los Angeles Lakers, is the main attraction for the auction, which ends August 2.

The locker was expected to fetch up to \$1.5 million, with bids reaching \$700,000 on Friday. Bryant, an 18-time NBA All-Star guard, was killed in a 2020 helicopter crash at age 41. He spent his entire NBA career from 1996-2016 with the Lakers.

A maintenance worker saved the locker from being discarded in 2018 during renovations of the Staples Center arena, according to Sotheby's. An American collector later acquired the piece. "Kobe Bryant's locker at the Staples Center is more than just a piece of memorabilia; it's a sacred relic of his unparalleled journey," said Brian Wachter, Sotheby's head of modern collectibles.

"This locker was Kobe's sanctuary amidst triumphs and challenges, a witness to the highs and lows of a storied

career. Every achievement and hardship left its mark within these walls."

The sale at Sotheby's also features memorabilia from sporting icons like Michael Jordan and Reggie Jackson, as well as items from contemporary stars such as Rafael Nadal and Ste-



phen Curry. Bryant's locker will be on public display at Sotheby's New York until Tuesday, alongside legendary Argentinian footballer Maradona's autographed 1986 World Cup semi-final jersey and NBA star Jordan's shorts from his final game. —AFP



The locker used by US basketball player, Kobe Bryant, at the Staples Center is displayed at Sotheby's auction house in New York City. —AFP photos

Paris 2024 Olympics' Opening Ceremony in Paris, France.—AFP photos



GAGA, DION, NAKAMURA ADD SPARKLE TO STAR-STUDDED OLYMPIC SHOW



US tennis player Serena Williams reacts prior to hand over the Olympics torch.



Former French football player Zinedine Zidane looks on as Spain's tennis player Rafael Nadal (right) carries the Olympic flame at the Trocadero.



Swiss mezzo-soprano singer Marina Viotti performs on stage.



French ballet dancer Guillaume Diop poses for a portrait.



A spectator is seen wearing glasses in the colors of the France national flag.

Lady Gaga, Celine Dion and French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura joined dancers, an opera diva and even a heavy metal band in an opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics that sought to proudly showcase French culture with a modern twist. The first-ever opening ceremony held outside a stadium -- on the River Seine -- had to battle driving rain that cast a pallid gloom over the City of Light. The fast-moving and multi-location ceremony masterminded by acclaimed French theatre director Thomas Jolly was aimed at impressing the global TV audience as much as those who braved the weather and intense security to watch live.

"It is now. The world is watching us. Let's open the Games in style!" French President Emmanuel Macron, who watched the ceremony in a VIP stand with other leaders, wrote on X.

In a nod to her passion for French culture, US pop star Lady Gaga appeared from behind a fan of pom-poms held by her dancing troupe to sing "Mon truc en plumes" ("My Thing With Feathers"), an iconic French music hall hit by the legendary Zizi Jeanmaire.

"It is my supreme honor to sing for you and cheer you on," Gaga wrote on her social media channels after the performance, saying she always "felt a very special connection with French people and singing French music."



US' singer Lady Gaga sings a song at the Sully bridge area.

symbol, she was accompanied in her performance by musicians from France's Republican Guard.

Canadian singer Celine Dion, who had been battling a rare illness, made a spectacular comeback by singing



Floriane Issert, a Gendarmerie non-commissioned officer of the National Gendarmerie, rides on a mechanical metal horse up the Seine river, wrapped in the Olympic flag.

Franco-Malian R&B superstar Aya Nakamura, the most listened-to French-speaking singer in the world, performed a medley with two of her hits "Pookie" and "Djadja" and a classic by Charles Aznavour, "For me Formidable", one hundred years since his birth.

Rumors she was to perform had sparked a backlash from the extreme right in France and a torrent of racist abuse on social media. But in a striking

from the Eiffel Tower at the climax of the ceremony with a rousing version of the "Hymn to Love" by Edith Piaf.

'Whole world united'

According to Jolly, the 12 different phases of the ceremony told the story of a country rich in its "diversity", "inclusive", "not one France but several Frances", and celebrating "the whole world united". He has been backed by a writing team including famed novelist Leila

Slimani and screenwriter Fanny Herrero, who penned the smash-hit casting agency comedy "Dix pour cent" ("Call My Agent"). In another highlight, the star "etoile" dancer of the Paris Opera, Guillaume Diop, performed on a Paris rooftop. For many French spectators, the highlight was the surprise appearance of the heavy metal group Gojira, who burst out onto platforms constructed on the Conciergerie, a key building in the French Revolution, where deposed queen Marie-Antoinette was held.

With a mannequin of a headless Marie Antoinette after her guillotine execution for good measure, they belted out the revolutionary chant "Ah! Ca ira".

In an unlikely collaboration, they were joined by the French-Swiss mezzo-soprano Marina Viotti, who makes no secret of her taste for metal as well as classical. Jakub Jozef Orlinski, a Polish counter-tenor who is also a break-dancer, interpreted an aria from the opera "Les Indes Galantes" by Jean-Philippe Rameau combining both of his talents.

The ceremony, which lasted just over four hours, had got under way with a clip of French actor Djamel Debbouze carrying the Olympic torch into the national stadium, the Stade de France, only to realize he should have gone to the river.

Helped by French football great Zinedine Zidane, he then takes the torch on an underground odyssey through Paris and hands it to a group of children who are then guided by a mysterious masked individual who then eventually passed on the flame towards the final relay for the cauldron.—AFP



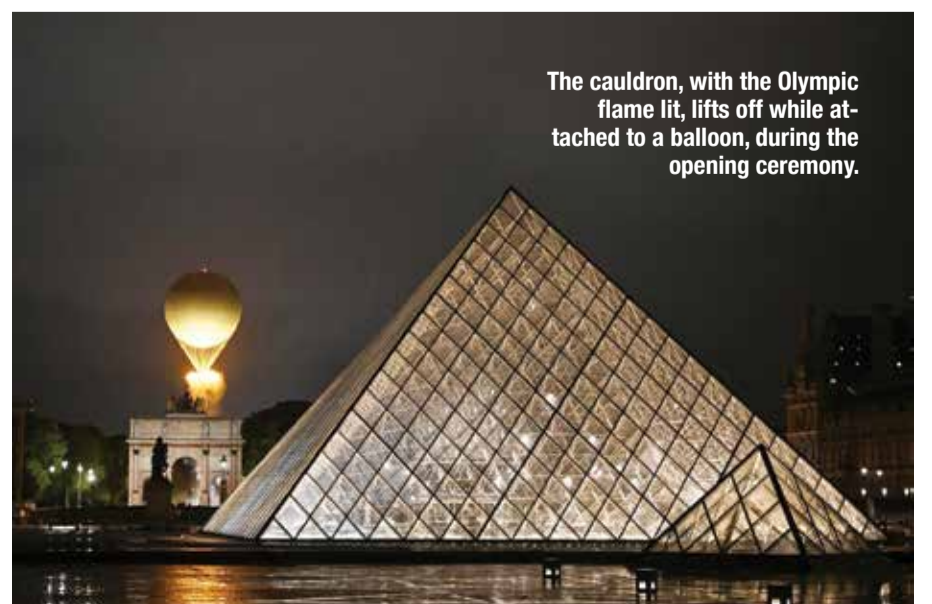
French Artistic Director for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Thomas Jolly, poses near the River Seine with the Eiffel Tower in the background in Paris.



Grab of a video released by the Olympic Broadcasting Services shows Canadian Singer Celine Dion performing on the Eiffel Tower.



Singer Aya Nakamura (center) and dancers perform on the Pont des Arts footbridge during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.



The cauldron, with the Olympic flame lit, lifts off while attached to a balloon, during the opening ceremony.



Gojira band Heavy Metal musicians perform during the opening ceremony.



Overview of the Trocadero venue, with the Eiffel Tower looming in the background



Eiffel Tower with illuminated wings in foreground after the opening ceremony.



The torchbearers French former sprinter Marie-Jose Perec and French judoka Teddy Riner arrive to light the Olympic cauldron.



Headless figures depicting the 18th century Queen Marie Antoinette perform along the Seine river embankment outside the Conciergerie, where the queen was held captive during the French revolution.



Former French football player and manager Zinedine Zidane carries the Olympic flame

The one of a kind Paris opening ceremony: Five memorable moments

Boundary-breaking, genre-defying and unprecedented: the opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics got the 2024 Summer Games underway with a pulsating energy and unique show that will never be forgotten.

Here are five memorable moments:

The uninvited rain

Opening ceremony mastermind Thomas Jolly, a renowned French theatre director, had carefully choreographed every minute of the festival along the banks of the River Seine.

But there was one factor he could not plan for -- the weather. The opening ceremony had the misfortune to take place as heavy summer downpours descended on Paris even as forecasts showed days of hot sunny weather ahead.

As the national teams paraded down the Seine on boats, they sought to make the best of the situation, likely hoping the damp would have no impact on health before events.

Renowned French classical pianist Alexandre Kantorow was drenched as he performed on a Paris bridge without any cover, while social media users expressed concern for his equally unprotected instrument.

Ironically, the piece he played was "Jeux d'eau" ("Water Game") by Maurice Ravel. An image of Britain's new

Prime Minister Keir Starmer meanwhile went viral showing him refusing to wear the standard plastic poncho to stay dry -- showing classic British defiance in the face of poor weather.

The great comeback

Canadian singer Celine Dion, who had been battling a rare illness, made a spectacular comeback by singing from the Eiffel Tower at the climax of the ceremony with a rousing version of the "Hymn to Love" by Edith Piaf.

Showing pitch-perfect intonation and hitting the notes with ease, she serenaded a captive Paris as the cauldron lit by France's most-decorated track athlete Marie-Jose Perec and three-time Olympic gold medal-winning judoka Teddy Riner soared into the Paris sky in a balloon.

Last month she vowed she would fight her way back from the debilitating rare neurological condition that has kept her off stage. Dion first disclosed in December 2022 that she had been diagnosed with Stiff Person Syndrome, an incurable autoimmune disorder.

A French classic

Some 80 artists from the celebrated Moulin Rouge cabaret performed the iconic cancan dance that dates back to the 1820s, in pink costumes specially

designed for the occasion.

The famous music however was given a new electronic touch that set the tone for an evening that sought to put a new twist on classic French culture. As the teams began their parade down the Seine they were serenaded by an accordion player -- dressed in the obligatory French outfit of beret and blue-striped T-shirt -- precariously perched on a bridge.

Defying discrimination

There had been a racist backlash on social media and criticism from the extreme right when it emerged that French Malian singer Aya Nakamura was to perform at the opening ceremony. But with President Emmanuel Macron himself backing her involvement, she and her dance troupe swung their way into a medley of her hits and a song by the great Charles Aznavour.

In an eloquent symbol, she received backing from the musicians of France's Republican Guard and performed against the backdrop of the Academie Francaise, the austere guardians of the French language.

A sequence of dancing promoting tolerance of sexual and gender identities ended with the actor Philippe Katerine appearing as the Greek God Dionysus naked and painted pink, with strategical-

ly placed flowers covering his modesty.

In possibly Jolly's greatest coup de theatre of the entire ceremony 10 statues of pioneering French women surged up from the waters of the Seine in a bid to inscribe their achievements in minds forever.

They included the French writer and activist Olympe de Gouges who was guillotined in 1793, Simone Veil, a Holocaust survivor who spearheaded the legalisation of abortion in France, and feminist activist Gisele Halimi.

Eclectic music

No-one could accuse the opening ceremony of being rigid in its choice of music with the city pulsating to all styles from classical, to opera, to pop to electro.

The ceremony did not stint on star power with Lady Gaga appearing to perform a French music hall classic and homegrown stars like the rapper Rim'K also performing at the ceremony.

But perhaps the biggest cheer came for the French metal band Gojira who appeared on platforms high on the Conciergerie, an iconic building in the French Revolution, the first time a metal band has appeared at an Olympic opening ceremony.—AFP



A torchbearer passes the Olympic flame to French former football player Zinedine Zidane.



The horsewoman walks with the Olympic flag past athletes at the Trocadero.



Polish opera singer and break-dancer Jakub Jozef Orlinski poses for pictures in front of the Invalides (Hotel des Invalides).



Performers dance along the banks of the Seine River during the opening ceremony.



Smoke billows near windows as performers participate in the opening ceremony.



Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal (second left) holds the Olympic torch next to US' athlete Carl Lewis (left), Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci (second right) and US tennis player Serena Williams (right) on the river Seine during the opening ceremony.—AFP photos



Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the Eiffel Tower.

Sports

Packers and Love seal record \$220 million four-year deal

Dolphins, Tagovailoa agree on 4-year \$212.4 million deal

WASHINGTON: Jordan Love has agreed to a new four-year deal with the Green Bay Packers that makes him level with the NFL's highest-paid players, according to multiple reports on Friday. The Packers, who moved Love into a starting quarterback role when Aaron Rodgers moved on last year, agreed to a \$220 million contract, according to ESPN and the NFL Network. Love's deal includes a record \$75 million signing bonus.

It matches the biggest NFL contract at \$55 million a year with fellow quarterbacks Trevor Lawrence at Jacksonville and Joe Burrow at Cincinnati. Love, 25, had decided to sit out of the Packers' pre-season training camp until a deal was complete. Green Bay and Love agreed on a smaller one-year deal ahead of last season, the signal-caller betting on himself and winning big on Friday.

Love completed 372 of 579 passes for 4,159 yards and 32 touchdowns last season and ran for 247 yards and four touchdowns in sparking the Packers to a 9-8 campaign and a 48-32 playoff victory at Dallas before losing at San Francisco. The Packers took Love with the 26th pick in the 2020 NFL Draft rather than seek more blocking and receiving help for Rodgers. Love spent three seasons as a reserve soaking up lessons from Rodgers, the first two in campaigns

when Rodgers was the NFL Most Valuable Player for a third and fourth time.

Dolphins, Tagovailoa deal

In another development, Quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, last year's NFL passing yardage leader, has agreed to a four-year contract extension with the Miami Dolphins worth \$212.4 million, according to multiple reports on Friday. NFL Network and ESPN reported the deal, with a total of \$167.1 million guaranteed in the agreement. Tagovailoa's average annual value of \$53.1 million in the agreement ranks third among NFL quarterbacks, behind the \$55 million of Cincinnati's Joe Burrow and Jacksonville's Trevor Lawrence.

Tagovailoa, 26, suffered broken ribs in the 2021 season and two concussions during the 2022 campaign, but last year set career highs of 388 completions in 560 pass attempts for a league-best 4,624 yards and 29 touchdowns. Not since Dan Marino in 1992 had a Miami quarterback led the NFL in passing yardage. The Dolphins have not won a playoff game since the 2000 season, dropping six in a row. Miami fell to Buffalo in the first round of the 2022 campaign and lost to eventual Super Bowl champion Kansas City last season. — AFP



Jordan Love #10 of the Green Bay Packers.

Luol Deng: The shining light of South Sudan's Bright Stars

NAIROBI: Refugee turned NBA star, Luol Deng has worked tirelessly throughout his career to develop basketball in his troubled homeland South Sudan, as federation president, patron and sometimes coach. And in just four years he has made South Sudan's "Bright Stars" one of the best teams in Africa, reaching a historic milestone as they compete for the first time at the Olympics in Paris.

As a player, Deng was an icon of Sudanese basketball, then South Sudanese basketball after the country's independence in July 2011. He followed in the footsteps of the giant Manute Bol, the first southern Sudanese to play in the NBA between 1985 and 1995. Deng's 15-year career in the American league saw him shine in the Chicago Bulls jersey from 2004 to 2014, earning two All Star selections in 2012 and 2013. He also competed in the 2012

Olympics under the flag of Great Britain, where he grew up during his itinerant youth as a refugee.

After retiring in 2019, Deng thought he would take some time to "just relax" and think about what was next. "And then came the opportunity" to lead the South Sudanese team, he told olympics.com last year. "And with that opportunity came the vision and ideas and dreams," he said. "I believed that we had the talent, that we are one of the best teams in Africa, that we can dominate in basketball just like how Kenya or Ethiopia dominate in track and field or like Jamaica does in sprinting."

'Build the chemistry'

Now aged 39, Deng has always been active on behalf of his homeland, whether working with international organizations or his own foundation, and publicly urged people to sign up to vote in the referendum on South Sudan's independence in 2011. Despite breaking away from Sudan after more than two decades of civil war, the world's newest nation has never known peace. It was torn apart by its own civil conflict from 2013 to 2018 and is still struggling to recover, mired in poverty and political and ethnic violence and frequently hit by climate disasters.

Originally from the city of Wau, Deng fled the war in Sudan as a child with his mother and eight brothers and sisters, for Egypt. It was there that he was introduced to basketball by one of his brothers, who followed training sessions given by Manute Bol during visits to the Sudanese community. He then moved to Britain where his father, the former Sudanese minister Aldo Deng, was granted political asylum. His basketball potential quickly took him to the United States, to Blair Academy and then to the prestigious Duke University before the NBA.

At Blair, he forged an unbreakable friendship with Royal Ivey, now coach of the South Sudanese team. "I remember seeing Luol walk into the gym at 14 years old, with one pair of shoes and just a dream," an emotional Ivey told AFP earlier this month, tears streaming down his cheeks. "His service to his country, his service to his people is one of none," he said in an interview during a training session in the Rwandan capital Kigali. "The talent is in South Sudan, but the resources aren't there. Luol has been the figurehead to push that forward, so the talent and the resources can connect and build that chemistry." — AFP



SPA: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen rides during a practice session ahead of the F1 race during the Formula One Belgian Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps Circuit in Spa on July 27, 2024. — AFP

Verstappen on top after rainy practice

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: Heavy rain reduced Saturday's third and final free practice for the Belgian Grand Prix to a washout of only a handful of laps after Lance Stroll crashed in his Aston Martin at the high-speed Raidillon corner. Stroll was unhurt and passed fit to continue after a check at the circuit medical centre but his accident, when he slewed off and spun into the barriers, was a clear reminder of the dangers at one of the fastest circuits on the calendar.

Raidillon, an uphill curve that follows the infamous Eau Rouge corner, was the scene of fatal accidents that claimed the lives of Belgian Adrien Nicolas, in a Biker's Cup eight-hours race in 2008, and Frenchmen Sebastien Clouzeau, in a Classic F3 race in 2013, and Anthony Hubert in a Formula Two race in 2019. Dutch racer Dilano van't Hoff also died at the circuit, on the Kemmel Straight, in a regional formula race, on July 1, 2023.

The session was red-flagged twice, once for Stroll's crash, and later when intensive rain rendered the track as unsafe, but the hour ended with two minutes of action before the chequered flag. After Friday's relatively balmy conditions, heavy rain welcomed the teams on Saturday as Verstappen was first out for FP3, the Dutchman wanting to evaluate his car after Red Bull had broken the overnight curfew regulations to improve performance.

Each team is permitted two exceptions to the rules during a season, Red Bull choosing to do so at the majestic Ardennes circuit with its capricious microclimates. Mercedes had also been busy and removed their new floor after struggling with it on Friday. Verstappen, facing a 10-place grid penalty for taking a new engine, had also held clear-the-air meetings with his race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase, technical director Pierre Wache and team boss Christian Horner following his swearing outbursts at last weekend's Hungarian Grand Prix. Yuki Tsunoda of RB was also handed a grid penalty — of effectively 60 places — after changing a wide range of power unit components including the engine, for a fifth time, and turbocharger.

Stroll loses control

On track, the early runners struggled for grip in the wet conditions as Verstappen and Piastri ran wide at Puhon, and Tsunoda and Norris at Malmédy before red flags signalled that Stroll had lost control and hit the barriers at Raidillon. The Canadian, whose mother is Belgian, was unhurt but it was a high-speed accident and severely damaged the left front wheel and suspension of his Aston Martin on one of the fastest sections of the circuit.

After six minutes, the lights went green, but nobody went out in the heavy rain, knowing that conditions could be very different for qualifying and for Sunday's race, when it is expected to be dry and warm. For the teams, that required compromising on Saturday set-up to avoid starting on Sunday in an unsuitable race trim. As the rain intensified, the race director ordered another red flag and sent the official medical car out to check the circuit conditions with spectators huddling under trees in anoraks, ponchos and umbrellas. McLaren took the opportunity to change the floor on Lando Norris's car following his excursion through the gravel at Malmédy.

As the rain eased, with two minutes remaining, a green light returned to re-start the action. Carlos Sainz led the way for Ferrari and was soon off, running through the gravel, before the session was ended without any meaningful laps clocked. Verstappen topped the times in two minutes and 1.565sec, 1.433sec ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Pierre Gasly with Norris fourth and Esteban Ocon fifth for Alpine. Verstappen completed only four laps in the early stages and neither George Russell of Mercedes nor Ferrari's Carlos Sainz clocked a lap time. — AFP



Chairman of the Kuwait Basketball Association Dhari Barjas with Kuwait's team. — KUNA

Gulf qualifiers gear for U18 Asia Cup

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Kuwait Basketball Association, Dhari Barjas, affirmed Saturday the completion of all technical and organizing

West Indies' treble strike rocks England in 3rd Test

BIRMINGHAM: Jason Holder produced a fine all-round display as the West Indies took three late wickets, including both England openers with successive deliveries, in a stirring fightback on Friday's opening day of the third Test at Edgbaston. Holder's 59 helped turn the West Indies' 115-5 into a total of 282 all out as they looked to restore some pride, having already lost this three-match series at 2-0 down. And the towering all-rounder then held two fine slip catches as England slumped to 38-3 at stumps, a deficit of 244 runs.

Zak Crawley fell for eight when he edged a loose drive off fast bowler Jayden Seales, with Holder holding a sharp chance to his left at second slip. England were now 29-1 off four overs exactly and next ball Crawley's opening partner, Ben Duckett, played on to Alzarri Joseph. England had sent in Mark Wood as a nightwatchman after Crawley's exit but he fell for a duck when edging Seales low to Holder.

Seales had figures of 2-19 in four overs at the close, with Ollie Pope and Joe Root — who both made hundreds in England's 241-run win in the second Test at Trent Bridge — set to resume on Saturday. "When you look at the pace of that wicket you'd think the batters would get in and go deep," said Holder. "Unfortunately none of our batters were able to do that but we got a fair few starts."

preparations for the Gulf qualifiers of the FIBA U18 Asia Cup 2024 to be hosted by Kuwait on Monday. Speaking in a press release, Barjas, head of the organizing committee, said the Shaikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Hall Complex is ready for the matches, referring to the cooperation of the Public Authority for Sport to finish all required arrangements.

The participating teams are arriving in Kuwait

'Give everything'

But West Indies' total looked far healthier as they hit back with the ball in an action-packed eight overs spanning some 40 minutes. "It was a bonus to get three wickets," said the 32-year-old Holder, appearing in his 67th Test. "At that stage the runs are irrelevant, we could just attack. With 40 minutes to bowl you can run in and give everything you can." England pacesman Chris Woakes, like many at Edgbaston, thought it was going to be England's day after he took 3-69 on his Warwickshire home ground. "When we bowled them out, I was really happy," said Woakes. "Obviously, to lose three tonight is not ideal, not the perfect end to the day, I suppose."

Earlier, West Indies were well-placed 76-0 after captain Kraigg Brathwaite won the toss beneath blue skies on a good batting pitch. But they then suffered yet another of the collapses that had been their undoing in the first two Tests as five wickets fell either side of lunch. Former captain Holder, however, found a solid ally in Joshua Da Silva (49) as the duo kept England at bay with a sixth-wicket partnership of 109.

But the remainder of the innings fell away tamely, with fast bowler Gus Atkinson taking 4-67 in 20 overs. After a watchful beginning, Brathwaite and Mikyle Louis played several fine shots, with the skipper completing a 70-ball fifty, including six fours. But England hit back when Louis (26) fended at Atkinson to give wicketkeeper Jamie Smith a simple catch. New batsman Kirk McKenzie, only half forward, was clean bowled by a 91mph (146 kph) full-length delivery from express quick Wood.

And to the last ball of the session, Alick Athanaze carelessly bottom-edged an attempted pull off Atkinson onto his stumps, leaving the West Indies 97-3

to start their competitions due on Monday, as Kuwait's team will meet Bahrain, he said, noting that the competition includes Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar. The top two teams will qualify for the Asian tournament to be hosted by Jordan in September, he elaborated. Gulf basketball has developed over the past years, and Kuwaitis get ready for these key qualifications, he said, stating that the 'Blue' held their camp in Turkiye for this event. — KUNA



BIRMINGHAM: West Indies' Jason Holder (left) plays a shot on the first day of the third Test cricket match between England and West Indies at Edgbaston in Birmingham on July 26, 2024. — AFP

at lunch. Brathwaite, 56 not out at the interval, had added just five more runs when he gloved an attempted pull off Wood down the legside to Smith. And 115-4 became 115-5 when Kavem Hodge, who made a maiden Test century at Trent Bridge, deliberately left a Woakes delivery only for the ball to hit the top of off stump.

But Holder counter-attacked by hitting 20-year-old off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who took a match-winning 5-41 at Trent Bridge, for several boundaries including a superb straight six. Holder went on to a 92-ball fifty, also including six fours. Da Silva, however, fell one shy of the landmark when caught behind off Woakes to leave the West Indies 224-6. And Holder's innings ended in decisive fashion when Atkinson flattened his off stump. — AFP

Sports

PARIS 2024

'We did it!': France breathes sigh of relief after Olympics ceremony

Climate protest in Paris foiled on first day of Olympics

PARIS: The concept had been derided as overly ambitious and the location criticized as a prime security risk. But after years of preparation, France could Saturday breathe a sigh of relief—it had pulled off the Olympic opening ceremony for the 2024 Paris Games. Opting for a ceremony on the waters of the River Seine rather than the standard option of a stadium was a theatrical gesture typical of President Emmanuel Macron but which brought considerable risks.

The day was also far from ideal. It began with news of three attacks on signal infrastructure on the French railway network which will disrupt travel for the next days and raises the prospect of a coordinated bid by so far unknown individuals to upset the Games. Meanwhile the weather conspired against organizers and spectators, with an unseasonable deluge drenching performers, athletes and onlookers protected by nothing more than plastic ponchos.

But the show went on. It lasted a marathon four hours, reaching a crescendo with a spectacular climax as the Olympic flame soared into the sky aboard a cauldron tethered to a balloon and Celine Dion serenaded Paris with an Edith Piaf song from the Eiffel Tower. The eclectic show put on by director Thomas Jolly was not to everyone's taste—the Times of London called it "surreal" and a "damp squib" but no-one could doubt its originality and daring.

And above all the mass event had passed off safely without incident. Parisians and visitors will now again be able to enjoy most of the city without brandishing QR codes to get through police barriers put up for the event that had put much of the riverside embankment into security lockdown over the last days. "With sabotage of railway installations in the morning and pouring rain in the evening, the opening day of the Olympics was chaotic but ended with a grandiose ceremony which broke all the rules," daily Liberation wrote on the front page of its Saturday edition.

'Creative genius'

Images of police snipers deployed on rooftops provided a stark reminder of the constant security

threat faced by France which has been hit by a spate of attacks by Islamist extremists since 2015. The ceremony also marked a boost for Macron after two turbulent months that saw him call snap parliamentary election that at one point raised the prospect of the far-right winning and forming a new government.

That did not materialize but the country remains in political paralysis after the polls and the president generally seen as a weakened figure with three years of his mandate to run. "Thanks to Thomas Jolly and his creative genius for this grandiose ceremony. Thank you to the artists for this unique and magical moment. Thank you to the police and emergency services, agents and volunteers," Macron wrote in an unusually triumphant post on X.

"Thank you to everyone who believed in it. We'll still be talking about in 100 years! We did it!" Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin added: "We did it! After four years of intense work to prepare for the world's biggest sport event, we have never been prouder of our security forces." Extreme-right MEP Marion Marechal harrumphed on X that she was left to "desperately seek to celebrate the values of sport and the beauty of France in the midst of such crude woke propaganda."

'Can't mess up'

Some spectators were frustrated by the rain and crowds obscuring the view but Jolly's concept appeared focused above all on the millions watching worldwide on TV at home. It also skillfully played on themes of French culture and history but with a modern twist and a plethora of in-jokes for those who wanted to find them. Jolly also celebrated modern France's diversity, highlighting artists of immigrant origin. "The opening ceremony is really the moment when you can't mess up. It's a successful gamble," communications specialist Philippe Moreau Chevrolet told AFP.

Climate protest

Meanwhile, French police on Saturday blocked climate activists from holding a demonstration in



PARIS: A general view shows the Paris 2024 Olympic Games cauldron attached to a balloon at the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris on July 27, 2024. — AFP

central Paris on the first official day of the Olympic Games. Protesters from Extinction Rebellion (XR), once notorious for shutting down bridges over the Thames river in London, had planned to occupy the Pont des Arts bridge over the Seine, which had hosted the Games' opening ceremony only hours earlier. Security forces are on high alert nationwide after saboteurs early Friday disrupted train travel throughout France.

The stunt on the bridge, which organizers previously said would be "more visible than disruptive", was called off after police kettled a group of journalists preparing to cover the protest. "The French gov-

ernment has deployed great resources to block our special Olympic action," Extinction Rebellion France said in a statement on X. "Our democracy burns and we are watching the flame of Paris 2024."

Activists are calling for more participative democracy and the creation of a citizen assembly to design a new climate-focused constitution for France, which finds itself in a political impasse following elections earlier this month. "We need a new model for society, which has to be fair and democratically accepted. We want to put citizens back at the heart of the political project that we want to see," said Sandro, an XR activist who didn't want to give his full name. — AFP



Officials take a group photo with Al-Tomooh Sport Club athletes.



Olympics positive vibes sensed at Al-Tomooh Club

KUWAIT: Members of the Paralympic Al-Tomooh Sport Club for mental disability experienced euphoric moments on Friday with the onset of the summer Olympics in Paris. The Club members have been entertained by watching the international sports event on a large screen. They were accompanied by the assistant foreign minister for GCC affairs Ambassador Najib Al-Badr, chairperson of the Special Olympics Kuwait Hanaa Al-Zawawi, the public relations director at the Public Authority for the Disability Affairs Doha Khamis, the general director of the Human Building Society Awatef Al-Salman, the chairperson of the Kuwait society for families of the disabled Rehab Bouresli, and the honorary chairperson of the Kuwait Club for the Disabled Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdullah. The estimated 150 members of Al-Tomooh Club practice field and track, swimming, shooting, racing, horseback riding and other games. — KUNA



Assistant Foreign Minister Ambassador Najeb Al-Bader honored.



429 Arab athletes target medals at Paris Olympics

ALGIERS: Some 429 Arab athletes are partaking in the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, which kicked off on Friday, vying to add more medals to their countries. During their previous Olympic competitions over 100 years, Arab athletes snatched 129 varied medals. They had won 32 gold, 33 silver, and 64 bronze and took part in the 1912 Stockholm Olympic games for the first time through Egypt's athlete Ahmad Hasanen.

Egypt came first in terms of medals at these games, collecting 38: eight gold, 11 silver, and 19 bronze, followed by Morocco with seven gold, five silver, and 12 bronze. Algeria came after Morocco, obtaining five gold, four silver, and eight bronze, followed by Tunisia, which won five gold, three silver, and seven bronze. Qatar, Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, and the UAE won the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth positions, respectively. Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Sudan, Kuwait, Iraq, and Djibouti were in the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th positions, respectively.

Athletes of the remaining Arab countries are searching for the first medal in the Olympic Games. Egypt was the first Arab country that snatched Olympic medals in 1928 in Amsterdam when Sayed Nusair won the gold of weightlifting and his compatriots Ibrahim Moustafa had the gold at Men's Greco-Roman light heavyweight wrestling, while Farid Simaika obtained the diving silver medal at Men's 10 m platform and the diving bronze at Men's 3 m springboard. Arab countries did not partake in the 1932 games, but Egypt took part in the Berlin games in 1936.

Due to World War II, the 1940 and 1944 games were suspended, and the competition was organized again in the 1948 London games when Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon joined the tourney. Lebanon took part in the Olympics for the first time in the 1952 Helsinki Summer Olympics, winning three medals: one silver and two bronze. — KUNA

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, **RAVIRAJ**, holder of Indian Passport No. Y6403728, having permanent address - House No. VI 139, Pedamale House, Bakrabail, Pathoor PO, Manjeshwar, Kasargod, Kerala, India Pin: 671329, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that I have changed my name to RAVIRAJ (given name) & SHETTY BAKRABAIL (surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name RAVIRAJ SHETTY BAKRABAIL. (#5639, 28/07/2024)

China takes first gold; Rain disrupts Olympic Games

Samoa boxing coach dies at Paris Olympic village



PARIS: Overview of the Trocadero venue, with the Eiffel Tower looming in the background while the Olympic flag is being raised, during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on July 26, 2024.



PARIS: China grabbed the first two gold medals of the Paris Olympics on Saturday as swimming prepared to take centre stage on a rain-disrupted first full opening day of sporting action. Asian powerhouses China, who last topped the Olympic medal table in 2008, made a flying start to their latest bid for supremacy, bagging early golds in shooting and synchronized diving.

Teenage duo Sheng Lihao and Huang Yuting won the first Chinese gold in the mixed team 10-metre air rifle event, before all-conquering divers Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen somersaulted to victory in the women's three-meter springboard final. Australia also celebrated its first gold with cyclist Grace Brown speeding to victory in the women's individual time trial.

Those were the first golds of 13 up for grabs in Paris on Saturday as wet weather continued to cause headaches for organizers following Friday's deluge at the opening ceremony. The men's street skateboarding competition, due to take place at the Place de la Concorde in the historic heart of Paris, was postponed until Monday due to rain overnight. The downpours also disrupted play at the opening rounds of tennis at Roland Garros, with play on the 10 uncovered outside courts delayed.

Torrential rain had lashed participants and spectators in Friday's amphibious opening ceremony, where around 7,000 athletes paraded along the River Seine in an armada of boats before a show-stopping finale which climaxed with a glittering light show at the Eiffel Tower and a performance from singer Celine Dion. The ceremony received broadly favorable reviews, with France's centre-right Le Figaro

Upset bishops and mixed reviews for Paris Olympics

PARIS: French bishops complained on Saturday about the "scenes of derision and mockery of Christianity" during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games which has upset some conservatives and has drawn mixed reviews. The opening had offered "wonderful moments of beauty, joy, rich emotions, and was universally praised," a statement from the French Bishops' Conference said. "However, this ceremony unfortunately included scenes of derision and mockery of Christianity, which we deeply regret," the bishops said.

While they did not refer to specific scenes, the ceremony featured a segment entitled "Festivity" which began with a group sat at a table, including several drag queens, which was reminiscent of the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus is said to have taken with his apostles. It was set to music by lesbian activist DJ Barbara Butch,



PARIS: Team Kosovo, Team Kuwait, Team Lao People's Democratic Republic and Team Lesotho cruise during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games Paris 2024 on July 26, 2024 in Paris, France. — AFP photos

daily describing it as "full of surprises but often disjointed."

The International Olympic Committee however was forced to apologize for a gaffe during the ceremony that saw South Korea's athletes incorrectly introduced as North Korean. Friday's ceremony also angered Christians and conservatives after featuring LGBT+ performers and a racially diverse cast. The French Bishops Conference said the extravaganza had made a "mockery of Christianity."

Swimming duel

Elsewhere on the sporting front, swimming was preparing for a battle royale in the pool later Saturday where the first golds will be decided. Traditionally one of the highlights of the opening week of the games, Saturday's first wave of swimming finals will feature a blockbuster women's

400m freestyle duel pitting American great Katie Ledecky against Australia's defending champion Ariarne Titmus. Ledecky, stunned by Titmus in Tokyo three years ago, laid down a psychological marker after pipping the Australian in Saturday's heats.

Titmus however rejected suggestions that the heats had given her rival an edge for Saturday's final at La Defense Arena. "It's a heats swim," said the Australian, who broke the 200m freestyle world record and swam the second quickest 400m ever at the Australian trials last month. "The only job for me was to get in the middle lanes (for the final) and I tried to conserve as much as I could." Other gold medals on offer on the first night of action in the pool come in the men's 400m freestyle and the men's and women's 4x100m freestyle relays.

In rugby sevens meanwhile, host na-

tion France stayed on course for a possible gold medal after advancing to a dream final against Fiji at the Stade de France. French rugby idol Antoine Dupont helped the hosts defeat South Africa 19-5 to book their place in the semi-final while Fiji comfortably downed Australia 29-7.

Elsewhere on Saturday, there were wins for Spanish star Carlos Alcaraz, rival Novak Djokovic and women's world number one Iga Swiatek as the Olympics tennis tournament got under way at a rain-swept Roland Garros. Alcaraz - who lifted the French Open in Paris last month - coasted to a 6-3, 6-1 win over Lebanon's lowly ranked Hady Habib while Djokovic dropped just one game in a 6-0, 6-1 rout of Australia's Matthew Ebden.

Swiatek meanwhile was made to work harder in a 6-2, 7-5 win over Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu. Saturday was also due to see Olympics action on the others side of the globe, with the surfing competition, some 16,000 kilometers away on the French Pacific island of Tahiti, due to get under way.

Coach dies

Meanwhile, Samoa's boxing coach died at the Paris Olympics village after the 60-year-old had a cardiac arrest, officials said on Saturday. Governing body the IBA sent its "heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues" of Lionel Elika Fatupaito following his sudden death on Friday, the day of the opening ceremony.

He was treated by emergency services but they were unable to save him, according to the local prosecutor's office, which said he died of "natural causes". "Lionel's dedication and passion for the sport have left an indelible mark on the boxing community," the International Boxing Association (IBA) said in a statement. "His legacy will continue to inspire future generations. Our thoughts and prayers are with team Samoa and all those affected by this profound loss." — AFP

which he said was illustrated by the opening ceremony.

"Western values were considered for a long-time as universal but are seen as increasingly unacceptable and rejected by many countries in the world," Orban said in Romania. Show artistic director Thomas Jolly had pledged last week that the ceremony would celebrate "diversity" and "otherness." Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, he said that his intention had not "been to be subversive or to shock." "Last night it was about our Republican values of benevolence and inclusion," he told reporters.

Bloated?

Reviews of the parade have been mixed. The quirky and high-kitsch parade which also featured ballet, opera and hard-rock has been broadly hailed in the French media. Sports newspaper l'Equipe said it had "left memories for a century." But writing in Britain's The Guardian newspaper, reviewer Arifa Akbar said there were some "thoroughly weird curatorial decisions." "Paris is known for its taste but this looked like a motley outfit thrown together," she said. Critic Mike Hale writing in The New York Times said the ceremony felt "bloated" and "worked to diminish the athletes". Overall it was "quintessentially French: titillating, hermetic, light on humor and heavy on pretense," he wrote. — AFP



Kuwait's fencer Yusuf Al-Shamlan



Kuwaiti rowing champion Soaad Al-Faqaan

Shamlan leaves Olympic Games

PARIS: Kuwait's fencer Yusuf Al-Shamlan was defeated 6-15 on Saturday in the 32nd round at Olympic Games Paris 2024, leaving the event early. In a press release, secretary of Kuwait Fencing Association Hamad Al-Awadhi said he is proud of Al-Shamlan, ranked 24 globally, adding that the player offered a good performance against his German rival Matyas Szabo. Al-Shamlan did his best to qualify for the Olympic Games and benefited from this event, Al-Awadhi said. Al-Shamlan is the first Kuwaiti fencer who cruised into the Olympic Games.

Al-Faqaan ranks 4th

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti rowing champion Soaad Al-Faqaan on Saturday completed the initial preliminary qualifiers by placing fourth in the (women's solo) race at Paris Olympic Games 2024. Al-Faqaan will have a second chance to qualify for the next round of competitions during the rehabilitation round for players from fourth to sixth place in the individual qualifiers scheduled for Sunday.

Al-Faqaan recorded a time of 8.16.32 minutes in the qualifying rounds, which was topped by American player Kara Koehler, who's recorded a time of 7.32.46 minutes. The rowing competitions were held on the Vaires-sur-Marne in the Seine-et-Marne region, north of Paris. Soaad Al-Faqaan's participation in marine sports is considered the first participation of Kuwaiti women at the Olympic Games. Meanwhile, Kuwait is participating in the Paris Olympics Games 2024 with nine players competing in six games: archery, fencing, swimming, athletics, rowing, and sailing. — KUNA